

AT HIS DUSTY FEET

JUDITH HEANEY

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Forward

It started with Ash Wednesday and a desire to do something during the 46 days of Lent. To do something that would draw me closer to Jesus and inspire a renewed intimacy with Him. For me, there is something wild and awe-inspiring about the extravagant love Jesus encompassed on His journey to Jerusalem, but also something breathtaking in the extravagant love some of His followers poured out on Him, in one case quite literally: the woman who washed His feet with an expensive perfume poured out from an alabaster jar.

*Then, six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom he had raised from the dead. So they prepared a dinner for Jesus there. Martha was serving, and Lazarus was among those present at the table with him. Then Mary took three quarters of a pound of expensive aromatic oil from pure nard and anointed the feet of Jesus. She then wiped his feet dry with her hair. (Now the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfumed oil.) But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was going to betray him) said, “Why wasn’t this oil sold for three hundred silver coins and the money given to the poor?” (Now Judas said this not because he was concerned about the poor, but because he was a thief. As keeper of the money box, he used to steal what was put into it.) So Jesus said, “Leave her alone. She has kept it for the day of my burial. For you will always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me.” **John 12:1-8***

When my connection to Jesus seems cursory and rote, my mind revisits this moment between Mary and Jesus. Mary always made Jesus the center of her attention when given the choice between Him and anything else. And this moment was no different but for how incredibly extravagant it was. So, when my own choice between Jesus and anything else becomes less than this, I long to restore that intimacy, that extravagance. I long for an expression of extravagant love in my life that will fill my life with the fragrance of nard poured out on Jesus’ feet by me.

That’s why I decided to walk with Jesus during His time in Jerusalem. I wanted to see Him through a raw and real love lived out in the moments on those dusty roads with His disciples. I wanted to choose Him over anything else, over *everything else*, and I wanted to know Him better than anyone or anything else. This devotional is the result of the choice to linger with Jesus like Mary, sitting close by Him, watching Him, listening to Him and simply *being* with Him. And even though it was a Lenten journey for me at the time, I came to realize that a 46-day journey with Jesus can be as useful during the summer or the fall or the winter as during Lent.

A journey with the Savior can be the cup of cold water your thirsty soul needs to cultivate an oasis of intimacy between you and Jesus at whatever time you need it. I hope this devotional and these words are that cup of cold water for you as you choose to linger with Jesus in Jerusalem.

*Trust in the Lord, and do what is right.
Settle in the land and maintain your integrity.
Then you will take delight in the Lord,
and he will answer your prayers.
Psalm 37:3-4*

Day 39: In the Company of Judas Iscariot

*Then, six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom he had raised from the dead. So they prepared a dinner for Jesus there. Martha was serving, and Lazarus was among those present at the table with him. Then Mary took three quarters of a pound of expensive aromatic oil from pure nard and anointed the feet of Jesus. She then wiped his feet dry with her hair. (Now the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfumed oil.) But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was going to betray him) said, “Why wasn’t this oil sold for three hundred silver coins and the money given to the poor?” (Now Judas said this not because he was concerned about the poor, but because he was a thief. As keeper of the money box, he used to steal what was put into it.) So Jesus said, “Leave her alone. She has kept it for the day of my burial. For you will always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me.” **John 12:1-8***

Today, on the journey to Jerusalem, we stop in Bethany, the place where Lazarus lives. The Lazarus who lives because Jesus raised him from the dead. And so, I recline with Jesus and Lazarus at the table. But my focus is not on Jesus as we sit around this table. It is on Judas Iscariot and Lazarus and the incredible difference in their responses to Jesus.

Judas exudes what feels like a sense of duty and obligation combined with unmet expectations. Jesus is neither who Judas wants Him to be nor who Judas expected and hoped He would be. Rather than a warrior king sent to defeat Israel’s enemies once and for all, Jesus is a rebel of redemption and a humble servant who takes on the religious elite rather than the Roman rulers. Unlike Judas, Lazarus radiates absolute, resolute joy; it’s in his smile, in the way his eyes light up as he speaks to and listens to Jesus, and in the relaxed, reclining position he has taken at the table near his dear friend and redeemer.

I cannot help but compare Lazarus’ joy-filled demeanor with Judas’ more stoic and business-like manner. Where Lazarus is comfortable and relaxed, Judas is tense and sharp, both in tone and posture. In the midst of this celebratory evening among friends, Judas’ response to Mary’s actions feels entirely out of place, and Jesus is quick to address it. He defends Mary’s extravagance, and in doing so, he convicts Judas for his greed and for his misplaced focus.

Does Judas feel Jesus’ rebuke? It’s difficult to say. Knowing that Judas, like the other 11 disciples, has been with Jesus throughout His three years of ministry and witnessed miracles and listened to Jesus’ words, how is it Judas remains reserved and reticent in the presence of this king? Who exactly is this man who travels with Jesus? I know where some of the other disciples come from and how Jesus called them to follow Him. But Judas? I don’t know much about him.

And so today I contemplate him. I wonder, was he as willing and eager to follow Jesus as Simon and Andrew, who dropped everything the moment Jesus invited them to follow Him? Did Judas have reservations even then, or was he so excited by the idea Jesus might possibly be the

Messiah for whom he'd been waiting that he left all he knew without hesitation? I can't help but believe he must have been excited at least initially. So when did that change for Judas? When did the reservations set in and when did he decide to steal from Jesus, or, even worse, to withdraw from Jesus?

I watch Judas. I watch the indifference he seems to have toward Jesus. I watch him bristle at the extravagance Mary demonstrates. And I cannot help but marvel at his mock indignation, claiming the perfume could have been sold to help the poor. How can he be in the presence of Jesus, not just around this table, but for three years now, and not be changed? How is it possible for him to be in the presence of Jesus and yet not embrace who Jesus is? Not embrace such powerful, unconditional love. Not embrace hope. Not embrace what Jesus is about and who Jesus is.

And yet even as I watch Judas with his indignation and seemingly duplicitous nature and even as I feel my own overwhelming love flowing from my heart for this Jesus who loves me with all my flaws, I wonder.

How many times have I looked more to my gain than to my Savior? How many times have I, like Judas, missed the opportunity to see before me the plans, the messy truth lurking in my own messed up heart? How many times have I sat in the presence of Jesus with ambivalence, distracted by my own agenda, my own needs, my own desires? How many times?

I can't count.

And so, today, I am thankful as I sit around this table where Martha serves and Mary worships and Lazarus adores for an opportunity to examine my own heart and my own motivations. Today, I am willing to look at the deep, dark places and ask Jesus to shine His light there. To seek forgiveness for the times I have put my desires for gain above my need for Jesus. To seek forgiveness for chasing personal gain instead of helping others. To seek forgiveness for my Judas moments.

Prayer

Dear Jesus, sometimes I forget I have moments that look more like Judas than Mary or Lazarus. Thank you for the grace you pour out when I come to you and confess my sins and my selfishness. Jesus, search my heart and shine your light into the dark places, and help me to release my grip on those things that only bring me pain or are good enough rather than your best and your joy and abundant love. It is in your forgiveness and grace I find the abundant life you so freely give.

Additional Scripture for Reflection

John 8:4-11

Matthew 7:2-4

Psalm 139:23-24

Day 20: A Dream Worth the Wait

Now on the first day of the feast of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb is sacrificed, Jesus' disciples said to him, "Where do you want us to prepare for you to eat the Passover?" He sent two of his disciples and told them, "Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him. Wherever he enters, tell the owner of the house, 'The Teacher says, "Where is my guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?'" He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there." So the disciples left, went into the city, and found things just as he had told them, and they prepared the Passover.

Then, when it was evening, he came to the house with the twelve. While they were at the table eating, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, one of you eating with me will betray me." They were distressed, and one by one said to him, "Surely not I?" He said to them, "It is one of the twelve, one who dips his hand with me into the bowl. For the Son of Man will go as it is written about him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would be better for him if he had never been born."

*While they were eating, he took bread, and after giving thanks he broke it, gave it to them, and said, "Take it. This is my body." And after taking the cup and giving thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank from it. He said to them, "This is my blood, the blood of the covenant, that is poured out for many. I tell you the truth, I will no longer drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God." After singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. **Mark 14:12-26***

I sit, knees drawn up and hugged close to my chest, my chin resting on my knees, soaking in the scene. We are in a large upper room. Jesus and His disciples have gathered for an intimate meal, the Passover meal. Everything is exactly the way Jesus predicted: the man carrying a jar of water; a gracious, generous homeowner; an upper room furnished, prepared, ready.

But who is the Master of this house? Is he a relative of Jesus? Otherwise, why was he expecting Jesus? What prompted him to prepare, to furnish a guest room for Jesus and His disciples? I wonder if maybe he had a dream, a vision, a God-ordained vision of just this moment.

Did he wake up one day, maybe years ago, having dreamt the night before about two men who would come to him, come to his house, this house, seeking a place to prepare a Passover meal with friends? And did his dream include Jesus? The Jesus who sits here now. Jesus the Christ. Jesus the Messiah. Jesus the Passover Lamb. I don't know, but how could he not have had some God-given vision? We know Jesus clearly knew about this man, that he had a servant who would fetch water, that he had an upper room, and that he had a generous spirit. To me, if Jesus

knew this, it isn't too great a leap to think that God has been preparing this man, too. Laid this dream, this vision, on his heart years ago.

Can you imagine it?

He knew they would come, but not when.

He waited every day leading up to Passover, looking, hoping, anticipating.

He prepared this upper room each Passover, waiting for these men who now fill this room, only to undo it all when they didn't show up.

What did he think when the men did not come?

What did he think as the years went by and still his dream remained only a dream? Only a vision. A vision that he believed in his heart, in his soul, to be from God. One that he held onto even though there was no reason to other than what he believed. How easy it would have been to give up. But apparently he didn't and at last, they are here.

Can you imagine it?

Can you imagine what today must have been like for him? Can you imagine what it's like to have Jesus sitting in this room with His disciples?

For such a time as this.

All these years waiting and being ready and today, finally today, the dream he refused to give up believing is unfolding before him. Here are the two men for whom he has been waiting. Here are the two men who ask him, 'The Teacher says, 'Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?''

For such a time as this.

Where was he when they finally showed up? What was he doing when they finally arrived? Was he upstairs, finishing up the final preparations on this room? Or was he working somewhere out back when he heard them come in, looking for him, calling out to him.

For such a time as this.

And his faithfulness has been rewarded. Jesus has come to this house. Jesus has come to *his* house. Jesus sits in the upper room that this man prepared and made ready. Jesus is here.

What an incredible sense of elation and emotion this man must have. Not only today, but at the time he received his dream. Knowing that he would play a role in this moment. Knowing that he was waiting for such a time as this.

Certainly such a dream can only come from God. Certainly such a dream can only be done *with* God.

And I wonder. Do I have a dream like that? Has God given me a vision for something that brings me joy and anticipation and the strength to see it through? Even if it means that I have to

wait? And then wait some more? Even if it means that I get ready for the moment, but the moment is not yet?

Do I have a dream like that?

Because I know I want one. I want a dream so big that it will take God to make it happen. I want a dream that will have Jesus showing up and being there. I want a dream that has Jesus in the midst of my efforts, that has Jesus as the reason for my efforts, that has Jesus expecting what I have been given to do.

I want a dream that has Jesus sending people to me because He knows that I will be ready.

Like this man was ready.

For such a time as this.

I dabble in dreaming, but I am not truly *daring* to dream, not a big, faith-filled, *faithful-to-Jesus* dream. In fact, too often recently, I'm afraid to dream. I haven't claimed my God-ordained vision. But I think it's time. I think I *need* to. So I am going to look at this life I've been given, take it up in my hands, and offer it to God. I want to see what He will do with it.

For my part, I will get up each day looking, hoping, and anticipating - preparing for what I know and believing in what I do. And the only way that can happen is if God gives me His vision. If I let God dream for me. If I surrender my control to His.

If I am ready for such a time as this.

And I am.

Prayer

Dear Jesus, thank you for this powerful picture of faith. For years as I've read this passage I wondered about Judas' role and how the disciples didn't realize he was the one to whom you referred. But this time, you have shown me something new and for that I am incredibly grateful. And I look to you and to the days to come with great anticipation and I wait to see what you will do when I offer all of me to all of you. I look forward to uncovering the desires of my heart that you have placed there, Lord.

Additional Scripture for Reflection

Esther 4:13-17

Jeremiah 29:11-14

Genesis 69-22