

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

The portion of Scripture before us this evening is found in the Gospel according to Saint John, the twelfth chapter beginning at the first verse, and we read in Jesus' name:

Then, six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was who had been dead, whom He had raised from the dead. ² There they made Him a supper; and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of those who sat at the table with Him. ³ Then Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil. ⁴ Then one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, who would betray Him, said, ⁵ "Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the

poor?" ⁶ This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it. ⁷ But Jesus said, "Let her alone; she has kept this for the day of My burial. ⁸ "For the poor you have with you always, but Me you do not have always."

Heavenly Father, these are Your words and therefore they are the truth. We pray, Lord, that You would increase our faith through them. Amen.

Dear Redeemed by the Blood of the Lamb,

When was the last time that you threw a party for Jesus? This may seem like a rather random question, but really think about it... when was the last time you threw a party for Jesus? I think for many of us the answer would be "never." We have never taken the time to plan a special day, with special food,

and special guests so that we can have a party for Jesus... and then I have to ask, “why not?”

I can remember at a previous church, instead of having a children’s Christmas they always had a “Birthday party for Jesus.” Of course it amounted to being a little kids get together, but it was done with the intention of telling the story of Jesus’ birth and praising Him. And maybe that changes your answer now. As a church we had a party for Jesus in December, not only to get ready for His birth but also so the kids could come together and hear about their Savior.

However, the party before us tonight seems a little more intimate. Jesus, His disciples, Martha, Lazarus and Mary... a tight group of friends and they were coming together to celebrate the life, and soon to be death, of Jesus. Yes, friends, in a mere week Jesus Christ was going to be crucified for the sins

of all mankind, thus as we gather around this ‘meal’ this evening, let us always remember that Mary, and all Christians, ***prepare for the day of His burial.***

This same account of Jesus’ life is given in the gospel of Mark but with a little more added to it. Mark relates to us that Jesus said, “***Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her.***” But why? Why is what this woman did so important? All she did was take some perfume and sprinkle it on Jesus... is that really so important? Yet, think about the circumstances and events surrounding this account.

Jesus was getting ready to die! Jesus was getting ready to enter into Jerusalem and offer His life for the sins of all mankind and as He came to this supper... no one cared. No one knew the agony and pain that He

was going through. No one, seemingly, cared that Jesus was about to give up His life for all of us.

In fact, Judas Iscariot became indignant about this whole event as did some of Jesus' other disciples. Instead of praising Mary for this great thing that she had done to prepare Jesus for burial, they got upset. "***Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?***" Why did you waste this perfume on Jesus? Why didn't you sell it? Why didn't you use it to take care of some earthly problem? Why were you being so thoughtless and cruel?

I can liken it to a famous devout atheist who after a terrible tragedy asked why Christians only prayed for someone and then he vowed to send them money. Why are you Christians being so thoughtless? Why are you only praying for someone? Why aren't you thinking more earthly? Why aren't you being

more like me... like someone who doesn't believe?

And while this may not have been said about the disciples, we know that Judas was, at this time, ready to betray Jesus. And Judas is the main instigator towards Mary and why she wasted this perfume and this money... and do we not do the same things at times?

Why are we going to have a party for Jesus, He won't even come to it? Why would we waste precious money and precious hours telling others about Jesus when all they do is close the door in our face? Why would we want to take our earthly possessions and give them to the church to use... shouldn't I use them and be happy before the church is?

Just like Judas, we too, can at times be very attached to our earthly things and what 'joy' and 'comfort' they can bring us. We are not thinking with a heavenly mind; rather we are

focused on this world and on the problems and trials here. Instead of spending Lent preparing for the death and burial of Jesus Christ we are concerned with the weather and with the toys and baskets for Easter and with the maintenance of our yards and Spring Cleaning and trips... but we haven't spent time with Jesus. Once we leave these four walls, Jesus takes a backseat and we are concerned once more about the worldly things around us.

And yet Jesus provides for us a stern warning and yet a gentle reminder, “***For the poor you have with you always, but Me you do not have always.***” The poor, the trials, the hard times, the things of this earth we will always have with us this side of heaven. We will not get rid of them... but Jesus... I worry that His warning can be lost at times. If we are so consumed with the affairs and concerns of the world, maybe we won't always have Jesus with us. When we turn

our attention away from Christ and turn to the world, we are turning our backs on God and we must worry if Christ is still with us.

However, in His warning is great promise also. Looking back on Mark's account of this Jesus says, “***and whenever you wish you may do them good.***” When we wish we can do the poor good... but not if we do not have the love of Christ first.

Yes, friends, as we prepare for the burial of our Savior we need to remember just what it is that we are preparing for. For the death of our Savior is not just another death, it is the death of the God-man, the perfect and holy Messiah, the Christ of God. Jesus Christ was the perfect, sinless, man who lived for each and every one of us. Jesus is the innocent and pure, holy lamb of God who bore the sins of the world in His flesh on the cross as He suffered the pains of hell for each and every one of us. Jesus is the only person, the

only One, who could live a perfect life that meant anything for me and die an innocent death so that all my sins could be taken away.

And now through faith in all that Jesus has done, I know, we know, that heaven is ours. Through faith in our Savior we know that our sins are forgiven and that we are now reconciled to God, our Father, through the blood of Christ.

And now that we are cleansed, now that we are washed in the blood of Christ, we can care for the poor of this world. We can care for physical needs, which we as a congregation do. But more importantly, and as Jesus was showing us, we can care for the spiritual concerns of the 'poor people'. We can care for those who have no faith or very little faith and we can strengthen that through God's word. We can take God's word and God's promises to His people that

they might know Him and know their Savior and thus be prepared for the heavenly banquet awaiting us all.

Dear friends in Christ, as we prepare for the burial of Christ, I pray that we can all take Mary's example to heart. When Christ is near us and when we are gathered together in His presence, then we can then we can come to Him and be with Him. Yes, Jesus has already died once for the sins of all and thus will not die again, but we can still prepare for Jesus' death and burial. We can still use all that God has given to us to make sure others, through our imperfect means, can learn greater spiritual truths about Christ.

Yes, six days before the Passover, the disciples and friends of Jesus still had no idea what was coming upon them. They were meeting for one last meal as a larger group and Jesus was still teaching them. I pray that as we continue to gather together in

God's presence and as we continue to prepare for Christ's death and resurrection, we can continue to come before Him, learn from Him and praise His holy name.

Yes, one more week and two more days for us... and then it will be our turn once again to experience the death of our Savior. I pray that we can take this final week and truly prepare our hearts and our minds for what we are about to experience. Do not let the concerns of the world weigh you down; rather, focus on Jesus Christ and all that He has done for all of you and your sins. And as we continue to live this side of heaven, may we *continue to prepare for His burial*.

Thanks be to God. Amen.