



Lighting the fourth Lenten Candle

We light the fourth Lenten candle to shine a light on ourselves in the story of the passion of Jesus.

May this light illumine our path as we walk alongside Jesus and others who walked with him, that together we may experience expanded insight and transformation along the way.

Entering the Story **Crossing the Threshold**

We continue our journey through Lent as we step inside the story full of difficult moments. We put ourselves in the picture of Holy Week so that we might take a closer look and let the ancient story open us to the deeper love Jesus extended to those on the margins.

Enter
Enter the story
Enter the place you belong
Not just looking on
For this is *your* story
Enter the story



Enter
Come enter the story
Enter the place you belong
Not just looking on
For this is *your* story
Enter the story

Besides the Last Supper, Holy Week contains another important story that happens at dinner. Earlier in the week, Jesus and his followers gather for a meal, and a woman shows up unexpectedly to anoint Jesus in an extravagant show of devotion. To say she caused quite a “stir” might be understating it a bit. We imagine ourselves in the room and we see the looks of judgment and even outrage on the faces around us. Are we ourselves moved by her generosity and outpouring of emotion? Or are we uncomfortable as Jesus refers to his own death? Does our complaining or anger really serve to hide our own fear? Jesus invites us to tell this story “in remembrance of her.” What uncomfortable stories are we called to tell in our time?

Enter
Enter the passion
Enter the place we belong
Not just looking on
For this is *our* passion
Enter the passion

[tag] Enter the story...
Enter the passion...
Enter his passion.

Prayer of Confession

We come into prayer together
People: It is so hard to not be afraid.
Sometimes our fear makes us less compassionate,
and more judgmental.
We think we can ward off getting hurt by holding back,
unwilling to risk putting ourselves out there for the sake of love.
Forgive us, O God.
Encourage us to extravagant acts of love,
especially when we are frightened.
God of Love you enter our story again and again.
May we have the courage to enter fully into the story
of your kin-dom on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

Opening Responsive Hymn

A Prophet-Woman Broke a Jar vs. 1 & 3 VU #590
(Tune VU #232)

Assurance of Pardon and Entering the Passion of Jesus

Peggy: Know this: There is no limit on love.
Love doesn't run out,
and you can start giving more of it anytime.
You are forgiven and freed,
encouraged and loved
by a God who wants you to live fully.
Let us enter the passion of Jesus.

Getting Perspective

Telling the Story

"I Love to Tell the Story" vs. 1 VU #343
I love to tell the story of unseen things above,
of Jesus and his glory, of Jesus and his love.
I love to tell the story, because I know 'tis true;

it satisfies my longings as nothing else could do.

Refrain:

**I love to tell the story; 'twill be my theme in glory
to tell the old, old story of Jesus and his love.**

An echo-prayer.

Holy Creator

We will dare to join the journey.

[Hand to heart]

We will walk your loving way.

[Walk in place]

We will live your sacred story,

[Hold hands like opening a book]

Through the things we do and say.

*[Hands open and outstretched on “do.” Hand cupped to sides of mouth on
“say.”]*

Amen.

[Praying hands]

Time with the Gospel

Mark 14:3-9

(A woman anoints Jesus)

In today's story we experience a meal along with Jesus and his friends.
Just like in life, sometimes there's good news and sometimes there's bad
news.

Every time you hear good news in our story, say *Amen!*

And every time you hear bad or sad news in the story, say *Aw, man.*

You've got it. Now let's enter the story.

It was two days before Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread.

[Amen!]

Jesus was at Bethany, visiting the house of Simon, who had a skin disease. **[Aw, man.]**

During dinner, a woman came in with a vase containing a very expensive perfume called nard. She broke the vase and poured the perfume on Jesus' head as a way to honor him. **[Amen!]**

Some grew angry. **[Aw, man.]**

They said to each other, "Why waste the perfume? This could have been sold for almost a year's pay and the money given to the poor." They scolded the woman. **[Aw, man.]**

Jesus defended her, saying, "Leave her alone." **[Amen!]**

"Why do you make trouble for her? She has done a good thing for me." **[Amen!]**

"You will always have the poor with you; and whenever you want, you can do good things for them. But you won't always have me here." **[Aw, man.]**

"She has done what she could. She has anointed my body ahead of my time for burial. I tell you the truth that, anywhere in the world the good news is announced, what she has done will be told in memory of her." **[Amen!]**

Great job. We celebrate this woman today because she took a chance in showing her love for Jesus. That vase of perfume was worth a lot of money. But the woman knew that Jesus was very special and worthy of the expense, even when the others thought it was foolish.

**Prayer after Reading
Loving God,
Help us live your story,
By daring to celebrate Jesus
Wherever we are.
Hosanna. Amen.
Listening to the Story**

Scripture - Psalm 23

Reader: The story of the woman with the alabaster jar appears in all four Gospels. Usually that means that it was such an extraordinary moment that no one would forget. Not only that, Jesus makes a point to instruct those present to remember this woman. Alongside this story today, let us hear the Psalmist, who also speaks of extravagant love and presence in the midst of the valleys of the shadows of death.

*“The Lord is my shepherd.
I lack nothing.
He lets me rest in grassy meadows;
he leads me to restful waters;
he keeps me alive.
He guides me in proper paths
for the sake of his good name.
Even when I walk through the darkest valley,
I fear no danger because you are with me.
Your rod and your staff—
they protect me.
You set a table for me
right in front of my enemies.
You bathe my head in oil;
my cup is so full it spills over!
Yes, goodness and faithful love
will pursue me all the days of my life,
and I will live in the Lord’s house
as long as I live.”*

Dwelling in the Story - Tableau

(A kind of “midrash” based on The Teaching artwork)

Dramatist: None of us around the table liked the way things were going here in Jerusalem. The conversation had turned once again to the dire situation for many of the people we had encountered, those who were hungry, poor, sick, disturbed. But does the Roman state care about them? No. At least we try. Every penny we can scrape up we try to pass on to those who need it. I had to wonder, though, whether the talk of asking our patrons for more money right now was really because we are afraid. Before Jesus arrived at dinner that night, some of the disciples had said with the

way things are going, perhaps we should be saving money in case we needed to hide out in the not-too-distant future.

And then SHE walked in.

I saw the jar she carried. Beautiful. Alabaster. And as soon as I smelled the oil as she began to anoint Jesus, I knew it was nard and it had been expensive. And there was a lot of it. Across the table the others were beginning to stop their conversations and looks of contempt began to cross their faces. Mumbling began. Do you know how much that kind of oil costs? It seemed a ridiculous waste, given what we had just been talking about. That kind of money could go a long way.

I looked down at her. I was close, and although she had not said a word, I could sense her intensity and devotion. This love lavished on him was somewhat embarrassing and yet it was what I really wanted to do—tell him how he had changed my life and how finally I felt I had purpose in my life. I felt loved, and it was such a gift. But how can you offer any gift to this beloved one? He IS “The Anointed One,” anointed by God. But here she is anointing him! I realized that what I felt was jealousy mixed with a deep fear that we were losing him.

I think we all are afraid of losing him. He tells us to stop judging her. “She is preparing me for burial.” No, I thought, don’t say that. It can’t happen. Later, I will remember her, just as he asked me to do. And I will remember that he asked us to care for all people the way she cared for him that night.

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Reflection – some thoughts

This story is found in all four gospels and with each rendering there are additions such as who the woman was, who was complaining, etc.

We are focusing on Mark's version the first gospel to be written and perhaps the one closest to what might have really occurred.

A few thoughts about Mark's version. The banquet is set in Bethany a town on the outskirts of Jerusalem. Jesus is reclining at a table in someone's home. The woman in Mark's version is unnamed, she risks insult and humiliation by entering a banquet uninvited and anointing Jesus feet. This is the second story in a short bit in which Jesus encounters an underprivileged woman who offers an extravagant gift. What is the story saying about women and ability to give from what little they have?

Mark tells this story in memory of the unnamed woman and Jesus said that what would be done will be told in memory of her. Do we tell the story in memory of her? This story offers an opportunity to think about all the women in the Gospels whose stories are not remembered or not told. As was the case then, there are so many women today whose stories are not remembered or are not told.

In Mark's version of the story the people who complain about the woman's extravagant generosity are just some people sitting at table. But why are they complaining? In the early Christian communities, it was important to share resources: material, friendship, love and power. An honorable person would never acquire more than what was needed because to do so was to use your power to take what was another's.

However, it is highly likely that many of the men sitting around the table were not honest in that regard and that is why they are bad-

mouthed the woman. Often when people feel guilty about something, they are doing that is not right they complain about the same in another.

In the story of the woman giving money in the temple and the anointing the woman, oppressed and poor, give all they have. Their actions come from compassion for others contrasted to others complaining that the money should be for the poor. One wonders why they raise concern over the perfume and the poor while unfazed by their own lavish dinner!

As was true in some many of Jesus' encounters with women, he did not reprimand the woman about values her action. She was anointing him, preparing him for what was to come. In this story she does not anoint Jesus' feet, but his head...anointing on the head is what one would do for a king. Here again we see Jesus being recognized as a King that will lead people toward justice and peace. Psalm 23: 5 "Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over."

A woman, oppressed, silenced, and invisible is the one appointed to anoint a king. What is this saying about the early Christians' teaching of Jesus? Jesus ministers to precisely this group of people sharing God's love extravagantly with them.

Again, there is so much going on in this story and perhaps you can continue to imagine other things that are happening and why they might be happening. Jesus calls for her remembrance and perhaps he is suggesting that when we tell his story we must tell her story and we must tell the story of all who are silenced, oppressed, ignored, despised, and rejected.

- A few questions: In situations when you complain about another person behavior and action,...what is being the complaining?

- How do you respond to your concern about the poor?
- How do you help to name and hold up the untold stories of women?
- What are you willing to risk for something you believe in or in someone who values us?

Each time we tell the story it may change but each time we tell the story we do so in memory of Jesus and the risk-taking woman.

Thanks to Amy-Jill Levine for her review and insights (*Entering the Story of Jesus*) of this story found in all four gospels.

Zooming In

The Body of Christ Gathers at the Table

Invitation to be in Communion with God and one another

One of the most creative things Jesus did in his ministry was to draw people into fellowship around a meal. His actions were “out of the box” in terms of those with whom he dined. Perhaps Jesus sensed that when the food and drink is filling the body, people’s guard come down just a little bit and they see their common humanity in their common hunger. Perhaps it is a good model for us to think about how church could sometimes get out of the box we put it in.

So, we come to the table to be reminded of this radical, hospitable, creative Jesus that we follow. And we follow his example of welcoming all who are hungry for love, for fellowship, for connection, for inspiration, for new life.

The Great Thanksgiving

[To the tune of “Abide with Me” VU #436]

Leader: O God be with you, now lift we our praise.

***People:* And God be with you too, now and always.**

Leader: Let us give thanks to God, so right to do.

***People:* All-loving Maker, we abide in you.**

It is right, and a good and joyful thing,

always and everywhere to give thanks to you,
Divine Artist, creator of heaven and earth.
Your brushstrokes evoked the whole of your palette,
making all creation into your colorful images.
You breathed into us the breath of life
and framed us with the Story of Love.
When we turn away, and our love fades
like a work of art long neglected,
you restore us to original glory.
You delivered us from captivity,
made covenant to be our sovereign God,
and spoke to us through your prophets.

And so,
with your people on earth
and all the company of heaven,
we praise your name and join their unending hymn:

Leader: Holy and Holies, loving is your sight,
***People:* So full of glory, is your Word, your Light.**
Leader: Bless-ed are those who feast in Jesus' name,
***People:* Your living light we come now to proclaim.**

Holy are you and blessed is the one we call Jesus the Christ.
You knew we needed a closeup encounter with you,
and you zoomed in the lens to meet us face to face.

Your Spirit anointed him
to preach good news to the poor,
to proclaim release to the captives
and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
and to announce that the time had come
when you would save your people.
He healed the sick, fed the hungry, and ate with sinners.

He invoked the powers-that-oppress in blessing a woman's actions
proclaiming different kind of power that put him at great risk.

Holy God, your work astounds us, in its power and promise.

By his baptism, our call is established;
by his suffering, our pain is companioned;
by his resurrection, our own lives are renewed.
By this covenant, the Spirit lives in us.

In that last week of Jesus' life, events public and private
began to lead to a moment in which he surrounded himself
with his dearest friends.

Who among us would not do the same
if we knew our time was drawing to a close?

Leader: Taking the bread and lifting up the cup

***People:* Giving his love, Jesus' shed all for us.**

Leader: Path of Redemption, trust so full of grace.

***People:* We will remember in this time and place.**

And so,
we remember your loving acts in Jesus Christ,
and we offer ourselves as part of the story of sacrifice and salvation
for the sake of the world.
We proclaim the mystery of faith.

I invite you to open your palms upward.
Take a moment to be still, to “freeze frame” this moment.
It is here that we come to be transformed by God's grace
into the beauty God intends.
Know that all we must do is open ourselves to receive.
The master artist of this moment—of all moments—
is at work to restore us even now.

[“Breath in, and you can feel that “breath of life” known already from the
garden of Eden.

Taste the bread and remember that John has told us that Jesus is the
bread of life.

Taste the grape and remember that John has told us that Jesus is the true
vine.

See the sunshine, or even flip the switch in the bathroom, and remember
that John has told us that Jesus is the light of the world.

Touch the palm of your hand and remember that John told us that the word
became flesh. Listen to the good news.] – Amy-Jill Levine

SHARING OF THE BREAD AND THE CUP

God of Life pour out your Holy Spirit upon all the world in this moment
so that we might know your presence and love in our lives.

Make us one so that we can co-create your reign on earth as it is in
heaven. Let this bread and fruit of the vine fill us with your Spirit of
courage, hope and faith during these days.

Prayer after Receiving

Holy Hospitable God, we give you thanks for what you have created in
this moment of our sharing: more connection to you in answering
Jesus' invitation to the table, more connection to each other as we
shared in the common elements, and more connection to the world as
we shine the light of compassion and hope from our hearts of love.
Amen.

Entering the World's Story

Hymn

Sent Forth by God's Blessing

VU #481

Benediction

Each week we invite you into the passion of Jesus.

We put a frame around a bit of life
sectioned off a scene,
looked long into a face,
to see what we could see,
to know what we could know.

Just as we have done with the art and story today,
zoom in your focus on the art and story of life all through the week.
The Divine Artist offers us such poignant beauty each day
in our own stories,
in the stories around us,
in the heartbreak and pain and joy and awe
of a simple moment turned significant.

That's what happens when we put a frame around it.
We zoom in
for a personal close-up

and search for clues
for living this life with more
attention and intention.

May you be blessed by the sacred frames
that surround the moments of your life
that you dare not miss.
Amen.

Worship Notes

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