

MVLC April 3 5th Sunday of Lent

John 12:1-8

Jesus' word to the gossipers. "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.*"

Let's see the picture: we have a woman called Mary who takes an Alabaster jar of expensive Indian perfumed oil - in today's market it would be worth around \$50,000

She let's her hair down.

She wipes Jesus' feet with her hair and the oil most of the oil goes down the drain

Who is this Woman?

In Mathew & Mark's version they don't name her they just say she was "a woman"

Luke says she was a "sinful" woman from the city _____

John says she is "Mary from Bethany" - one of Jesus closest friends - You know Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus.

But for most other people in the world she is known as "Mary the prostitute"!

Why? Nowhere does it say she was a prostitute.

There're a lot of Marys in the scriptures and there was another incident of a woman pouring oil on Jesus feet - but that was in another place and at another time - another incident.

Mix all the Marys together and the sinful woman and we have "Mary the prostitute".

Then we have Pope Gregory in 590 AD declaring that **Mary was officially a "prostitute"**.

He had put all the Marys in one bag along with the "Sinful Woman" and came up with Mary the prostitute - and most of us followed that ever since

Poor Mary from Bethany was officially a prostitute until Vatican II in 1970 when Pope Paul reread the scriptures and realised the mistake of the church.

Pope Paul revoked the churches position and said:

"Mary was not a prostitute but a devoted disciple who supported Jesus financially and spiritually" - thank you Pope Paul.

Why did the popes get it so wrong - it's as plain as day that this lady is Mary from Bethany Martha and Lazarus's sister.

This is the Mary that sat and listened to Jesus while Martha fussed - Mary was served by Jesus - Mary done the better thing.

And in this story she also does the better thing.

She breaks the Alabaster jar of oil - \$50,000 dollars' worth.

Maybe this oil was meant for Lazarus - but he rose from death, didn't he?
She only used a fraction of the oil - the rest was wasted - spilled - down the drain.

A drop would be enough.

She lets her hair down - this is intimate stuff this is husband and wife stuff.

This is a culture where women held their beauty behind veils.

They only unveiled themselves for their husbands.

They only let their hair down for their husbands. These are not man's rules - they're God's rules.

Imagine today if wives kept their beauty for their husbands only??

Just walk down the street, or the river, or the beach on a hot day - and you will see **that the beauty of every wife is unveiled for every husband.**

Of course, in some cultures the male is the object of beauty - but not in God's eye - the woman is always the object of beauty - he made her that way.

Keep your beauty for your husband - God's way.

(Don't we smash the Muslims for doing just this)

Mary is not shy about her hair.

I know a woman who saw her *first grey hair* -
she thought she might dye.

This Mary of Bethany who lets her hair down; she opens her beauty, for who?

For JESUS

Jesus is not her husband - is he?

She breaks the \$50, 000 jar of perfume for who?

JESUS

Jesus is not her husband - is he?

Can you hear the gossipers - "she's acting like a prostitute - she is a prostitute"!!

But she wasn't a prostitute - even pope Paul after 570 years declared she wasn't a prostitute.

This Mary from Bethany is one of Jesus closest friends who knows exactly what Jesus is going to go through in the next few weeks.

Funny, lot's of people say she acted like a prostitute - no-one says she acted like a wife to Jesus?

We know she was very intimate - we know she wasn't a prostitute

What's the message?

Jesus is my husband - my spiritual husband - I am his spiritual wife.

Is that a bit farfetched?

What does God say right through Scripture? The LORD declares, "for I am your husband. I *will* love you and *bring* you to me" (Jeremiah 3:14)

I am your husband -- *the LORD Almighty is my name*—I am *the Holy One of Israel* - I am your Redeemer (Isaiah 54)

Husbands, love your wives just as *Christ loved the church* and gave *his life for it*. (Ephesians 5)

And Revelation

And I saw *the Holy City, the new Jerusalem*, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared and ready, like a *bride* dressed to meet *her husband*.

And John standing right next to Jesus says: '*The groom is the person to whom the bride belongs. I am just the best man, who stands and listens to him, and is overjoyed when the groom speaks. This is the joy that I feel.*' (John 3:29)

From day one God portrays his relationship with his people as tender and intimate - like a husband and wife - the church the bride and Jesus the groom.

But PROSTITUTE????

She acts like a wife just before Jesus prepares to lay down his life for his wife - the church you and me.

What a message - She pours the oil down the drain - her brother has been raised to life - she's promised to be raised to life - we're promised to be raised to life - Jesus is about to be raised to life.

Who needs a daggy old Jar of perfume - used to disguise the smell of death - when there is no death.

What a message.

Is she a prostitute or messenger??

What a message - perfume fit for a king just days before Jesus is crowned and triumphs over death.

This woman is Mary from Bethany with an object lesson for us all.

One of Jesus' closest friends

You know that time Jesus wept?

He wept when he saw Mary crying over her brother Lazarus.

Jesus held it together until he saw Mary cry.

When Jesus came to her house Mary listened to Jesus - Martha fussed.

Jesus said - Mary has chosen to listen to me do not take that from her.

In the last part of this account that same protective side of Jesus comes out again: (Matt 26)

"Why are troubling Mary? She has let her hair down - she has poured out this oil for me. She has done it to prepare me for burial.

Truly, I say to you, wherever this gospel, [this account of Mary] is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her."

Jesus affirms her - history condemns her.

Mary from Bethany is the messenger, the prophet in love with her husband who is going to lay down his life for his bride - the church.

No expense, no amount of gossip was going to deter Mary from telling the good news in her own way - to the world.

You know, they say women could not speak or preach in the church.

Mary from Bethany preached the perfect sermon - with no words - just a few loving actions.

Are you prepared to face gossip and condemnation because what you do for Jesus is not in line with the world?

Are you prepared to face gossip and condemnation as you enact your faith?

Are you able to preach the gospel with actions - this is the best form of communication for the Aussies we come across.

There's strength in numbers - we as a church are the bride - and he is the husband.

He promises to protect us - through war after war, or flood, or COVID or whatever - he promises the church will remain.

Do we trust him to protect us - to lay down his life for us?

The prophecies say he did - history says he did

The church has a husband who will lay down his life for us - this is Mary's message.

I know this imagery works better for women than men - but the fact remain we have a protector a provider.

And when the church goes wrong and has eyes for other gods - He simply divorces her? Right?

Not true - He washes her with words of forgiveness and the waters of baptism. Then He presents her to himself as a glorious, radiant, bride - without stain or blemish.

This is for Lainie especially today; One day she'll be a dodgy bride of Christ, she'll but Jesus on the back burner - he wont divorce her .

He'll wash her with words of forgiveness and the waters of baptism. And he'll present her to himself - glorious, radiant, without stain or blemish.

How can we bear witness to the husband, the protector, and provider, of the church.

It starts with trust - it results in acts of love perhaps very intimate acts of love.

Let's never forget the most important thing Mary did to witness

- she just sat at Jesus feet and listened
- she allowed him to serve her
- Jesus said she did the better thing.

"Assuredly, I say to you, wherever *this* gospel is preached *in the* whole world, what *this* woman

- Mary from Bethany - has done *will* also be told as a memorial to her."

Let's pray:

Lord Jesus you are *the husband of the church* -you laid down your *life for the church*.

We have no need of expensive *perfume* to preserve *us in* death - through you we live eternally.

Like Mary prepare *us* so that *actions can bear witness* to you - and give us *strength if these actions bring on* the curse of gossipers and mockers.

In Jesus name Amen.