

Adult Teaching Resources

April 7, 2019



Lenten Season (March 10-April 14)

Purposeful Love

John 12:1-8 – “The Scent of Love”

Luke 23:1-49 – “Of Passion and Pain”

Easter Season (April 21-June 2)

John 20:1-8 – “Best. News. Ever.”

Resurrection Realities

Acts 5:27-32 – “First Allegiance”

www.nurturingfaith.net

Subscribe to *Nurturing Faith* to access the core Bible content for this lesson.

Find links and videos related to this lesson.

The Scent of Love

John 12:1-8

FIT Teaching Guide

by David Woody

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Bible Background

“You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.” John 12:8

Foot washing is a beautiful image of servanthood and humility. We love to talk about it in church. We love the stories. We love the images.

For the vast majority of us, we don't want someone else washing our feet. Today, we explore a passage about foot-washing, and a lot more.

Opening

After your group arrives, ask everyone to form small groups of 3-4 in each group. Once groups are formed, ask each person to share their experience with foot washing or hand washing in a worship experience.

When did it happen?

Where did it happen?

What did they feel or experience?

Did they wash or were they washed?

What did the washing experience mean to you?

Give each group time to have conversation around these questions. Then, as time allows, open up the floor to the large group for volunteers to share their experiences with foot or hand washing.

Reading the Bible

Where did Jesus go? (to Bethany, the home of Lazarus)

What had he done to Lazarus? (raise him from the dead)

What did Martha do at the dinner? (Martha served)

What did Mary do at the dinner? (wiped Jesus feet with her hair)

What did Judas say about Mary's actions? (Why was this perfume not sold for 300 denarii in the money given to the poor?)

Why was Judas concerned about the cost of the perfume? (Because he was a thief, he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put in it)

What did Jesus say to Judas? (Leave her alone she bought it so that she might keep it for me for the day of my burial)

Making Connections

Our Lesson Writer says, "Jesus knew how to be a friend: he understood that true friendship involves both giving and receiving. As he gave of his time, energy, and compassion to others, he also allowed others to show love and kindness to him." What is your understanding of true friendship? How do you live it out?

What is the most expensive gift you gave a friend? What could you have used that money for at that time in your life? Was buying a gift a good use of your money? Why do you say that?

Our Lesson Writer asks a great question, "We often think of our service to Christ as growing from duty or obligation. How often do we show real generosity in Jesus' name, simply for love?" How often do you show real generosity in Jesus's name, simply for love? How do you show real generosity in Jesus's name, simply for love?

When have you been offended by what you considered to be a poor choice in spending? What did the money go towards? What do you think the money should have gone toward? Was the expense ultimately a good decision?

What expensive item that you currently own, are you willing to share, or give away, or use until it can't be used anymore?

What does verse 8 mean to you?

So What?

Ask everyone to gather back in the small groups from the beginning of the lesson. Ask each group to consider these questions for conversation and discussion:

What is servanthood in the name of Christ?

How is sharing Jesus an example of serving others and serving Jesus?

Who in your community needs to experience the love of Christ?

How would they know the love of Christ came to them?

What can you group or church do to make that happen for them?

Give each group time to discuss these questions, and then open the floor for the larger group to have conversation.

The Challenge

This week, intentionally live into servanthood. Who do you need to serve by sharing Jesus with that person? What is the first step? Go do it!

Prayer

Loving God, you challenge us to serve and to be served. You challenge us to spend and to save. You challenge us to live for you while living in the world. Keep us focused on living in your name, living the way you lived, loving the way you loved. Amen.

Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartlege

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

One story, or two – or three?—John’s gospel was probably written later than Matthew, Mark, and Luke, which are usually called the “synoptic gospels” (“synoptic” means “seen together”) because they are so similar, with all three following Mark’s basic outline. The Fourth Evangelist’s writing is quite different, tending to be more theological and philosophical in outlook. He is more likely to report long speeches by Jesus than miracle stories. When stories similar to those in the synoptics appear, they often vary in detail and emphasis, and this is the case with our text for today.

A quick comparison of John 12:1-8 and the synoptic versions (Matt. 26:6-13; Mk. 14:3-9; Lu. 7:36-50) shows that none of the four agree at every point, though all have some similarities. Matthew and Mark are so similar that they certainly represent the same story. Luke has some sharp differences, and John even more. Was one event remembered and retold in so many different ways, or was there a rash of women, like modern-day groupies, wanting to pour perfume on the rock star teacher of their day?

It’s likely that the four versions point back to a single event that was remembered and recorded in different ways, but it’s also possible that there were at least two separate but similar events, one recorded by Matthew and Mark, and another by Luke and John.

For more on this, see “The Hardest Question” for this lesson.

What a friend—Consider this exercise: without consulting a hymnal, divide the class into teams and have each one see how many traditional hymns or contemporary songs they can name in which Jesus is described in some way as a friend. When presenting their lists, if they can’t recall the song’s title, have them sing the line containing the word “friend.”

A pound of detail—The text is usually translated to say that Mary brought a “pound” of nard. The Greek word is from the word *litra* (from the same root as our word “liter”). While “pound” is an appropriate translation, we should take note that it referred to a Roman pound, which was a bit less than 12 ounces, or three-quarters of a pound when compared to system of weights used in the U.S.

The perfume itself, also called spikenard, was made from the crushed spikes and roots of the *nardostachys jatamansi* plant. The plant is a native of northern India, difficult to obtain and hard to prepare. For Mary to obtain it, the ointment would have had to be imported over hundreds of miles of perilous caravan routes and treacherous terrain. All of these factors added to the expense.

In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the woman is said to have transported the ointment in an *alabastron*, a jar or vial carved from alabaster, a soft stone.

Digging Deeper *continued*

Oh, how I love Jesus—Have you ever run across someone who was so effusive in his or her love for Jesus that you found it somehow offensive? I remember attending a revival service at a Pentecostal Holiness church when I was in high school, not knowing how emotional some charismatic Christians could get. In talking about his love for Jesus, the guest preacher got down on his knees beside the pulpit and got so excited that he said “I love Jesus. I love Jesus so much. I just want to make love to Jesus!” I was so offended that I left (fortunately, I was sitting near the back). I had never heard anyone talk about Jesus in that way.

Mary’s actions in today’s text could have been considered just as shocking. Some present thought she loved Jesus too much – or demonstrated her love too openly. Perhaps those of us who find it difficult to freely express love for Jesus could learn something from Mary.

Less and more—Whether Mary poured out all of her ointment that night or saved some for the burial is really immaterial: it was all for Jesus, not for herself. Perhaps you have known Scrooges who hold their treasure tightly and share only rarely, reluctant to give anyone something they think they don’t deserve.

I’ve always liked a couplet from a sonnet by William Wordsworth:

*“Give all thou canst; high heaven rejects the lore,
of nicely calculated less or more.”*

(from “Inside of King’s College Chapel, Cambridge”)

If Jesus were here—Sometimes we may imagine that if Jesus was standing before us in the flesh, we would surely do something to show our love to him. What are some specific ways in which we can express our love to Christ even when he is not physically present? Consider reading John 12:8 and Matt. 25:40 together while pondering this. Any ideas?

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartlege

The Hardest Question is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

How do we explain multiple accounts that are so different?

When readers look closely at the text and discover how differently some biblical authors tell what seems to be the same story, they may respond in different ways. Persons who are committed to the notion of “biblical inerrancy” must either ignore the problem (a popular option) or find some way to explain it away.

But there are clear problems with the telling of this story, as indicated in the first “Digging Deeper” entry above. Similar accounts are found in all three synoptic gospels (Matt. 26:6-13; Mk. 14:3-9; Lu. 7:36-50), but none of them agree at every point, and all share both similarities and differences with the story in John.

In Matthew and Mark, the story has Jesus in Bethany at the home of someone called “Simon the leper.” In Luke, Jesus is in an unnamed city (the last-mentioned town mentioned was Nain), in the home of a Pharisee named Simon, who is not called a leper. In John, Jesus is in Bethany in the home of Lazarus, Mary, and Martha. Some apologists trying to smooth out the differences have suggested that Lazarus was a leper (perhaps that’s why he had died?) who was also called Simon, but the argument is not convincing.

In Matthew and Mark, the woman pours costly ointment on Jesus’ head; in Luke and John she anoints his feet: that’s quite a difference. Did she pour ointment on both head and feet? Did people remember differently and tell the story in different ways? That can happen easily.

In identifying the ointment-bearer, Matthew and Mark refer only to “a woman,” while Luke describes her as a notorious woman of the city, known to be a sinner (hence the widespread proposals that she was a harlot, or that she was Mary Magdalene, or that Mary Magdalene was a harlot – which is not necessarily the case). John, however, identified her clearly as Mary the sister of Lazarus and Martha, who is never implicated as a sinful woman, but only as a close friend of Jesus.

In Matthew and Mark, the disciples take offense at the cost of the expensive ointment being “wasted” on Jesus, while in John only Judas expresses offense, and that with mixed motives. In Luke, the host becomes indignant, not because of the value of the ointment, but at Jesus’ willingness to let a sinful woman touch him so intimately.

What really happened? What’s the real story? If the variant traditions stem from a single story, does that mean the Bible contains errors? And if the Bible doesn’t consistently get it right about a story like this, can we trust the story it tells about Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection?

These are serious questions that have troubled many people, but they don’t have to keep us awake at night. To any careful reader, it is obvious that the Bible contains many

The Hardest Question *continued*

contradictions and internal disagreements in matters of detail. Sometimes multiple versions of the same event are recorded, with no attempt to harmonize them, with the two very different creation stories in Gen. 1:1-2:4a and Gen. 2:4b-25 a prime example. At other times, two variant stories might be spliced together, preserving incompatible details, as we find in the flood story of Genesis 6-8, or the story of David and Goliath in 1 Samuel 17.

Even the gospel stories about Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection vary in significant ways. This means that, yes, there are errors in the Bible to the extent that it is not perfectly consistent: stories are told in different ways.

This does not mean that the Bible is not true or trustworthy, however. The important thing is not to get caught up in the surface details, but focus on the deeper truths. Stories about the resurrection are all over the map, for example, but all of them agree that Jesus rose again.

In the case of today's text, there might have been one original story told four ways, or two stories, or as many as three. Maybe there were other women in who wanted to get close to Jesus, and heard that he had let someone else pour perfume on him. It doesn't matter. All four of the gospel writers included a story about a grateful woman who poured out her love onto Jesus in the form of a costly ointment. The stories may differ in detail and emphasis, but all remind us that Jesus deserves our love, our generosity, even our willingness to do something scandalous for the sake of the kingdom. We must be careful not to let the challenge get lost behind our questions.

So King Adoni-zedek of Jerusalem sent a message to King Hoham of Hebron, to King Piram of Jarmuth, to King Japhia of Lachish, and to King Debir of Eglon, saying, "Come up and help me, and let us attack Gibeon; for it has made peace with Joshua and with the Israelites." Then the five kings of the Amorites—the king of Jerusalem, the king of Hebron, the king of Jarmuth, the king of Lachish, and the king of Eglon—gathered their forces, and went up with all their armies and camped against Gibeon, and made war against it. (Josh. 10:3-5)

The narrative goes on to assert that the leaders of Gibeon appealed to Joshua, who marched his army through the night from Gilgal and succeeding in "inflicting a very great slaughter on them, until they were wiped out ..." (Josh. 10:20).

One is reminded of the old story about the tailor who claimed to have "killed seven at one blow," when what he had killed were flies.

The "kings" of the Amorites and Canaanites that Joshua faced were far more than flies, but as leaders of armies typically numbering in the hundreds rather than thousands, they were kings of a lesser sort than we normally imagine.