

EXPLORING THE SUNDAY GOSPEL

CEMETERY

EXPLORING NEXT SUNDAY'S THEME

Introducing the Gospel

Anointing Jesus' feet (John 12: 1-8)

The Fifth Sunday of Lent initiates Passiontide and prepares the people of God for the events of Holy Week when Jesus will be arrested and crucified. During Passiontide, we approach the death of Jesus in confidence of the resurrection. In John's Gospel, when Mary anointed Jesus' feet with costly perfume, she prefigured his burial. But all this was done in the very place where Lazarus had already been raised from the dead. So, too, will Jesus be raised from the dead after his burial.

The image to stimulate reflection on John's introduction to Passiontide is *cemetery*.

Core extract from the Gospel (John 12:2-3, 7; for reflection throughout the week)

There they gave a dinner for Jesus.
Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him.
Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard,
anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair.
The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.
Jesus said, 'Leave her alone.
She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial.'

Gospel prayer (for use throughout the week)

Lord Jesus Christ,
by your cross you teach us
that death is the gateway to life.
Bless and comfort all those who mourn,
that they may hold fast to your promise
of life eternal;
now and always.
Amen.

READING NEXT SUNDAY'S GOSPEL

John 12: 1-8

Mary anoints Jesus

Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, 'Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?' (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) Jesus said, 'Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.'

ENGAGING WITH THE THEME

Dwelling with the text (John 12: 1-8)

Begin to explore how John leads us into Passiontide by employing the SIFT approach of Sensing, Intuition, Feeling, and Thinking. You may find that one of these approaches comes easier to you than the others. But it is worth trying all four.

- What details in the passage catch your attention (Sensing)?
- What big ideas in the passage spark in your mind (Intuition)?
- What most touches your heart in the passage (Feeling)?
- What most stretches your mind and makes you think in the passage (Thinking)?

Thinking and talking

Identify topics within the passage that can get you thinking and talking. Here are some ideas to get you started.

- What is significant about Jesus meeting in the home of Lazarus so close to his own death?
- What is significant about Mary anointing Jesus' feet?
- What is significant about Judas' intervention?
- How do you understand Jesus' response: you always have the poor?
- What does this narrative say for us today?

Using your Bible

Compare similarities with the synoptic tradition.

- Mark 14: 3-9
- Matthew 26: 6-11

Recall the narrative of the raising of Lazarus.

- John 11: 32-44

Explore the place of Mary and Martha in Luke.

- Luke 10: 38-42

Explore the Gospel accounts of anointing Jesus for his burial.

- Mark 16: 1
- Luke 23:55 – 24:2

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Note how Genesis speaks of embalming, under Egyptian influence.

- Genesis 50: 1-2
- Genesis 50: 26

Exploring online

Widen your exploration of John's introduction to Passiontide by looking up some of the following themes and others of your own choosing.

- John 12: 1-8
- Mary of Bethany anointing Jesus in classic art
- Images of cemeteries

Drawing on experience

The image to stimulate reflection on John's introduction to Passiontide is *cemetery*. Draw on your own experience of cemeteries. For example:

- How do you feel about the graveyards surrounding ancient churches?
- Which cemeteries have left a lasting impression on you?
- Have you visited wartime cemeteries?

What have you learned about cemeteries?

Creating and making

This section offers pointers to some creative activities that may be inspired by John's introduction to Passiontide or by the image of cemeteries.

- Make a mural of the dinner in Lazarus' home.
- Make a display of fragrant perfumes.
- Create a collage of images concerning cemeteries.
- Create a reflection, poem, or prayer on the theme of John's introduction to Passiontide or on the image of cemeteries.



EXPLORING THE SUNDAY GOSPEL

Each week we are inviting people in their homes to look forward to those Sunday services that follow the Revised Common Lectionary Gospel readings. We employ the SIFT approach (Sensing, Intuition, Feeling, and Thinking) to encourage reflection on the Sunday Gospel. We are suggesting a variety of ways in which people of all ages, and households working together, may engage with the Gospel reading and celebrate that engagement with shared activities.

These materials have been developed by the Canon Theologian of Liverpool Cathedral working in collaboration with the staff team here at the Cathedral, and with sponsorship and support from the St Mary's Centre in Wales.



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