

## Lent V/Passion Sunday      7<sup>th</sup> April 2019

**Readings:** Isaiah 43:16-21; Ps.126; Phil.3:4b-14; John 12:1-8

### Reflection

It's Thursday morning and I read the following from Thomas Merton's reflections<sup>i</sup> before taking a Midday Cathedral service: *'Love comes out of God and gathers us to God in order to pour itself back into God through all of us and bring us all back to Him on the tide of His own infinite mercy. So we all become doors and windows through which God shines back into His own house.'*

It's Friday morning and a page three article in The Press challenges status quo, tradition and hierarchy with a vision of a 'new interfaith heart' for Christchurch. And - however jarring, exciting or thought-provoking that vision might be, its sentiment stirs within, as I again read from Isaiah, the words of hope and promise offered to God's people exiled in Babylon – *'do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?'*<sup>ii</sup>

It's Friday afternoon, and Muslim women, and men – some wearing gumboots below their flowing thobes – are striding purposefully towards the al Noor mosque. The sign outside simply states: 'Sorry, FULL' – a place of prayer and worship, a body of faith recently terrorised, left flowing with blood, now overflows with commitment to love.

It's Sunday morning - and a soggy collage of wilting flowers, hand-written messages, posters, drooping paperchains, and wreaths exude a powerful beauty, even as they fade, dissipate and compost along Dean's Avenue. Some might label the outpouring 'Extravagantly wasteful' love.

LOVE – is a divine gift – a gift to be extravagantly outpoured in word and action.

She'd used spikenard<sup>iii</sup>, pure nard - a whole pound of it...it wouldn't have just filled the room, or even the house – the scent would have clung to all of those present – it would have hung on their clothes, it would have settled in their hair, it would have permeated and overwhelmed their senses. That much pure essential oil would have been so powerful, you would have almost tasted it. And it wouldn't have dissipated quickly or easily, but would have remained.

Mary's hair would have held that fragrance for a long time – after he was gone, the memory would stay with her, more alive because her sense of smell would have brought it flooding back. And so every time she moved or walked, tossed in her sleep or put her head in her hands, she would have been reminded of him - of what he had meant to her, done for her – what she had done for him.

Some had told her that her extravagant act had been wasteful, but she didn't agree. I mean, really, how can you waste love?

I wonder how long the scent stayed with him? When they waved their palm branches in the air, did the fragrance waft through the crowds, did it stir some deep-seated emotion in them? Would they have understood its significance? And would *he* have felt a bit more determined because of this lingering anointment?

Before the disruption started in earnest, when his soul was troubled, did it ease him? I am certain that it hung in the air in the upper room as the feet were washed and the supper eaten.

And then, when the trouble came so rapidly and his friends fell away and there was betrayal and denial, I wonder if he was comforted...upheld...affirmed by the fragrance that still surrounded, embraced him. When he was marched and dragged all over Jerusalem, I wonder if the oil still soothed his feet? When they drove the nails in, did the sedative effects calm him, the scent reassure him? And at what everyone

else thought was the very end, I wonder if he looked down and saw her face, remembered her gesture when the breeze sent the aroma to him.

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Some had told her that her extravagant act had been wasteful, but she didn't agree - neither did he. I mean, really, how can you waste love?

We know what love is: love is patient and kind, it rejoices in the truth, it hears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends...and really.. it can't be wasted.

Who knows how long your gifts of love, no matter how costly, will cling and linger, comfort and reassure. Love does not dissipate quickly or easily, but remains. Think of those who gifted *you* with love – how those gifts have held you! Those are the faces you still see, the voices you still hear, the touches you can still feel long after they are gone. Those are the times in your life that do not dissipate easily or quickly, because they are so powerful. We need to remember this story of Mary, who did not hold back her gift, but poured it out extravagantly.

I think we need to remember this story:

*When we decide about how we will spend our money;*

*When we think about how what we have and what we do impacts on those we share life and the planet with*

I think we need to remember this story:

*When we talk to our children...our grandchildren...our Godchildren;*

*And when we argue with our lovers;*

*And when we decide about how we will spend – yes, spend! – the precious time God has given us here on this earth...*

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Some had told her that her extravagant act had been wasteful, but she didn't agree – neither did he. I mean, really, how can you waste love?

Go out and use it – all you have – it won't dissipate easily or quickly – it will remain with those you have loved.

In the name of God,

Love-maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver.

Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Bridges to Contemplative Living with Thomas Merton, p.58, Ed. Montaldo, J & Toth, R.G., Ave Maria Press Inc, Notre Dame, Indiana, 2009

<sup>ii</sup> Isaiah 43:18,19a

<sup>iii</sup> A reflection on John 12:1-8 by Sally Foster-Fulton, slightly adapted by Helen Roud, Lent V, 2019