

 **Main Street**  
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



**Mark 14:1-11**  
**“The Odors Of Love And Hatred”**

March 20, 2016  
(6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent)

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**“Following Christ From City Center!”**

MARK 14:1-11

"THE ODORS OF LOVE AND HATRED"

Acceptance Framed By Rejection, Clash Of Kingdoms!

**EVIL PLOT** 1) 14:1-2 HOSTILITY TO JESUS: CHIEF PRIESTS/SCRIBES PLOT. All Called To *Watch*, 13:37

1 It was now two days before Passover (1 day feast) and the feast of Unleavened Bread (7 days feast). Intercalation/ Sandwich (1-2-1'), //12:41-44, Frame For Mk. 13 Wednesday, Dating (v.1) + Action (v.2a) + Reason (v.2b)  
2a And the **chief priests** and the scribes 11:18, 27, 14:43, Males Plot, Religious Leaders(Sanhedrin) //8:31, 9:31, 10:34  
b were **seeking** how to arrest him by stealth, and kill him; How? Plot Evil! //3:6, 11:18, 12:12, Official Opposition  
for they said, John 11:47-53, Jesus' Great Popularity With The People  
"Not during the feast, lest there be a tumult of the people." Must Be *Before* Feast, Fear Riot, Ps. 10:7-8, Wis. 2:12  
Crowd's Protection Of Jesus: 2:6-12, 11:32; 12:12, 37b; Turn (15:11,15)

2) 14:3-9 THE HONORING OF JESUS: ANOINTING AT SIMON'S HOUSE.

Freely Chosen Evil Contrasted With Providence Of God, //Mt. 26:6-13, Jn.12:1-8

a) v.3 The Woman's Deed: Extravagant, A Royal Anointing (Done By OT Prophets).

**LOVE** Previously Unknown House //6:10, 2 Miles East, 11:1, 11, 12  
3 And while he was at Bethany in the house of Simon "the leper," Host, 1:40-45, Healed, Re-Socialized  
as he sat (reclined) at table, //2:15-17, Jesus Eats With The Wrong People  
a woman came with an *alabaster* flask of ointment of *pure* nard (fragrant oil), very *costly*, (3x), Wealthy Matron  
and she broke the flask and poured it *over his head*. Ps. 23:5. Interruption, Royal Anointing, Prophetic Sign  
Alabaster Never Used Again, Sound & Smell

b) vv.4-5 Commentary Of Some Who Were There: Concern For The Poor?

Totally Miss The Significance, Look Down On Her  
4 But there were some who said to themselves indignantly, Is *Some* = *The Twelve*? 10:41  
"Why was this ointment thus wasted? Demeans The Woman, Is Jesus A Waste?  
5a For this ointment might have been sold for more than three hundred denarii 1 Yr Male, 2 Yr. Female  
and given to the poor." Issue Is Extravagance, Is. 3:13-26, 10:21 (Command To Rich Man)  
Jn. 13:29, Almsgiving Was An Important Passover Tradition

c) v.5b She Is Reproached For Her Extravagant Display Of Devotion.

She Had Insight They Do Not: Jesus Is A King About To Die!  
b And they reproached her. On Jesus' Behalf, Flared Nostrils! Loudly, Male Objections  
Embarrassed By Her Display! Prefer Moderation

c') v.6 Jesus' Counter-Reproach And Questioning: He Praises Her Act.

Contrast In How Money Is Used! Worship, Treachery  
6a But Jesus said, Not Mary Magdalene, *Contra* Ephraem The Syrian(4<sup>th</sup> century)  
b "Let her alone; Command To Desist + Probing Question + Long Explanation  
c why do you trouble her?" //10:13-16 On Children, Jesus Defends Her  
She Alone Gets It Right! He Is Worthy Of The Sacrifice!

b') vv.7-8 Commentary Of Jesus: The Poor/The Woman. Discipleship As Devotion

//12:41-44, Fabulous, Spontaneous Gift, 15:46  
7a 1 She has done a beautiful (good) thing to me. Not Wasted, Rabbinic Debate/Charitable Works  
b 2 For you always have the poor with you, She Was Discerning, Not Cynicism, Realism  
3 and whenever you will you can do good to them; Dt. 15:11, Our Duty As Disciples

**PROPHECY 1** 2' but you will not always have me. Prophetic, Jesus Has Great Worth, Only A Short Time, 2:20  
8 1' She has done what she could; No Mere Victim, Acted At Right Time With Love, 13:37, 12:24  
she has anointed by body beforehand for burying. Prophetic, Not Banquet Ritual But Burial Of A King  
Burial Rite Is Meritorious, *Tobit* 1:17-20, 2:3-8

a') v.9 The Woman's Deed: Gospel Memory And World Mission. A Lavish Legacy

Most Positive Comment In Mark = Model Of Discipleship// 12:41-44  
9 And truly, I say to you, 3:28, 8:12, 9:1, Solemn *Amen* Introduction, Prophecy, Divine Revelation  
**PROPHECY 2** wherever the gospel (good news) is preached in the whole world, Looks To Mission, 13:10, 37 (She Is Alert)  
what she has done will be told in memory of her." True! Praised As Example, Deed Remembered, Unnamed  
Good News = Jesus Is Worthy Of Extravagant Following!

**EVIL ACT** 1') 14:10-11 HOSTILITY TO JESUS: JUDAS JOINS CHIEF PRIESTS. 3:19, Tragedy & Treachery

Helps Jesus Accomplish Necessary Mission, *dei*, Mk. 8:31, 9:31, 10:33  
10 a Then Judas Iscariot, who was "one of the twelve," Sad, Betrays Call (3:19, 14:43), Proximity Not Equal Faithfulness  
went to the **chief priests** in order to betray him to them. Collaborator, Judas Seeks Them Out! Delighted At Providence!  
11 b And when they heard it they were glad, Example To Follow, Another To Shun! Male Plot  
b' and promised to give him money. Joy In Evil! She Gives Up Money; Judas Takes It  
a' And he **sought** an opportunity to betray him. 3:19 Twelve Listed With Judas Last, Lk. 22:3, Jn. 12:6, 13:2, 27, 29

## THE ODORS OF LOVE AND HATRED

*"For you always have the poor with you.... but you do not always have me."*

Jesus' commentary on compulsive do-gooders who lack a sense of timing.

### MARK 14 : 7

I remember it well. The day Terrell Dowdy wore too much cologne. The bell rang Herds of students moved into the hallowed hallways of Cheraw Elementary. As Terrell strode down the wide, wooden-planked floors in his white Converse All Stars, a cloud of incense wafted behind him. When I walked into his vapor trail without warning, I knew precisely what brand it was.

It was the spring of '65. I was in the sixth grade, and the men's fragrance *Jade East* was popular. Along with Beatle bangs, it was a winning combination, an exotic aroma associated with kung fu and almond-eyed maidens. Now Terrell ascribed to the theory of cologne application that if some is good, more's better. He was a year older, had real muscles, a blazing fastball, and ranked considerably higher in the pecking order of popularity. He was certified cool, I a mere wanna-be. One does not challenge such credentials without a clear path to an outside door.

There we were, lined up in blue gym shorts and white tee shirts at the edge of the basketball court. In walked Coach J. Roy Martin. You could tell when he first picked up the scent. It stood in contrast to the pungent odor of male gym clothes stuffed in lockers for weeks. The sweet and the sweat were a toxic combo.

J. Roy looked up and down the line of post and pre-pubescent boys, then followed his sniffer. He paused in front of the offender and took a deep breath, "Boy, did you take a bath in that stuff? Hit the showers. You stink!"

We were then given a hygiene lecture on why gym clothes should be washed once a week and informed that cologne was no substitute for soap. When Terrell returned with wet hair, there yet remained a faint reminder of his excess. As if on cue, we all held our noses and said *P.U.* Then we all ran.

Brain science tells us smell is linked to memory. Rubbing-alcohol I associate with the suture room in dad's office, the smell of leather with my first baseball glove. Now because the Bible presents itself to our eyes as words on a page, we often

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neglect our other senses in understanding Scripture. Since we Protestants left incense to the Catholic and Orthodox wings of the church, our atmospherics are lacking. We Methodists do not worship with our noses, except at covered dish suppers!

As I sniff about the story, I find an odoriferous atmosphere as tens of thousands of pilgrims make their way towards Jerusalem for the feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread. There were food vendors in the streets, and sheep herded into manure-laden pens, soon to have their throats slit in the sacrifices of Passover. The smoke of their roasting flesh will soon cloud the sky over Jerusalem with holy smog from ten thousand fires covering the hills where everyone is camped.

In Bethany, just two miles away, I catch a whiff of fresh bread baking at Simon's home. Then the heavy sweetness of pure spikenard as a surprise outpouring. What was it like when the syrupy oil dripped off Jesus' brow and under his messianic nose? Her act was lavish, the kind of display that embarrassed everyone except the one she loved who now smells to high heaven.

Moderation is often taken as a balance to excess, the virtue of the middle way. But in some things, say the love of a man and a woman or the worship of the living God, moderation is worse than doing nothing at all. To hold back is pure insult. C.S. Lewis writes, "Christianity, if false, is of no importance; and, if true, of infinite importance. The one thing it cannot be is moderately important."<sup>1</sup>

What salt is to meat and praise is to excellence, that is what devotion is to faith. Jesus says it's the heavy smell of his burial rites, and he prophesies that the fragrance of this woman's devotion will go with his messengers to the ends of the earth. The Bible is full of sights for those with eyes to see, full of sounds for those with ears to hear, aromatic with smells for those with alert nostrils, and full of feelings for those whose hearts are not yet hardened. For those Jesus touched and healed, the remembrance of the skin-to-skin contact stayed with them.

But there is a stench in the story as well, the smell of murder and betrayal, a gangrene of rotten souls releasing obnoxious gases and alerting us evil is near. In verses 10 and 11 we walk into a conspiracy that has the smell of sulphur about it:

"Then Judas Iscariot, *one of the twelve* (a dear friend) went to the chief

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<sup>1</sup> PreachingToday.com search under *Devotion*.

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priests in order to betray Jesus to them. And when they heard it they were glad, and promised to give him money. And he sought an opportunity to betray him.”

Several times I have smelled the presence of evil. A creepy feeling, a sudden awareness something’s wrong, a whiff of something gone sour and rotten. Each of our senses has a role in discernment. They alert us to information from the visible world (touch, taste, sight, smell, sound), and may– when highlighted by the Holy Spirit’s early warning radar– cue us to information in the invisible world as well.

In these verses Mark invites us to breathe deeply the sweet fragrance of devotion and hold our noses against the foul odors of sin and evil. Only Jesus and the unnamed woman smell good. The chief priests and scribes who plot in fear of losing power stink. Judas who bites the bait of betrayal stinks. The dinner guests– probably the disciples– who do not understand the worth of Jesus, don’t smell so good either. How else could they ask, “Why was this ointment *thus wasted?*” Sorry, guys. God is more than an efficient dispenser of limited this-worldly resources. God is love, and love is the lavish currency of the Holy Trinity spilling out on the world. So if, in the presence of Jesus, you find yourself using a calculator, you’ve missed it already.

**TURNING TO THE TEXT**

**1) Hostility To Jesus: Chief Priests And Scribes (vv.1-2).**

It’s now two days before Passover, Wednesday the 13th of Nisan, forty-eight hours before the certified lambs are slain in the temple courtyard. Roads are choked with pilgrims. Jerusalem is bulging from fifty thousand to a quarter million.<sup>2</sup>

Passover was the height of the Jewish calendar, a time to commemorate the Exodus from Egypt when the Lord took a nation of slaves and made them his people. The pilgrims prayed that (perhaps even this year!) God would raise up a new Moses to break the oppressor’s yoke and restore the nation to its former glory. Religious zeal and political resentment are an explosive mixture, so the Roman garrison was fortified and temple guards put on alert by the high priest. Galileans were especially suspect as hotheads. Pontius Pilate– whose residence was on the coast in Caesarea– and King Herod were both in town and had made impressive entrances into the city.

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<sup>2</sup> The estimate of Joachim Jeremias.

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In verses 1 and 2 we catch a glimpse behind the scenes where a strategy session is convened by the Jewish Council– the Sanhedrin– to lay a trap for an upstart rabbi from Nazareth whose been causing troubles and raising expectations because of his kingdom of God teachings and his kingdom of God actions– mainly healings and exorcisms, but also his personally proclaiming forgiveness apart from temple rituals as if he had the perfect right to do so. He ushers people into a new reality, and they can't get enough of it. Where he goes, things change; hopes are stirred.

Who was he to ride into Jerusalem to cries of *Hosanna* and other messianic pretensions? He'd then taken his band of rowdies into the outer court of the temple and made a scene, disrupting for a short time the sacrificial system on which Passover depended. The peace of Jerusalem must be protected. "If we don't," they must have reasoned, "the Romans will, and we will lose what autonomy remains."

Jesus had quite a reputation. If they nab him during Passover and the seven day feast that follows, there might be a riot. "Not during the feast," they agreed, "lest there be a tumult of the people." But if they didn't nab him soon, they'd have to wait till after the festival of Unleavened Bread, and could they risk so long a wait? How do you find the man in the great crowds? They needed an informer, an insider.

Providence is the Christian conviction that the Living God is always at work in history and through our decisions to bring about larger divine purposes in a manner that never ends. We propose; God disposes. We do good out of the love God offers, and God multiplies its effects. We do evil for whatever reason, and God limits its scope, though sometimes the scope is very large, say Hitler or Stalin. History in all its complexities, its beauties and horrors, is moving towards a final collision with the kingdom of God in which all will again be set right and Jesus will be seen in his full beauty and glory. So when we sing, "He's got the whole world in his hands..." it's a celebration of God's providence. And when we sing, "O God our help in ages past, our hope for years to come," it's God's guiding hand of providence that we celebrate. There is now resistance on battlefield earth, but nothing fallen angels or sinful humans accomplish in concert will in the end frustrate the purposes of God to heal the creation and welcome all who wish to participate.

But since God is not currently the only invisible actor on stage, the idea of providence also has a dark equivalent, which means that if you purpose to do evil, a way will appear to welcome and aid your choices. If you want to sin against God and people, opportunities come looking for you! There are other forces at work at ground level. After all, who is it that enables and energizes and resources all the evil that

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men and women desire to do and sometimes creates large movements that do great evil before the burn out and fail? Who plants all those idea and impulses in our already corrupted and vulnerable hearts and minds? We know his name, and we have all felt his allurements and pressures. The chief priests and scribes who meet in secret are not the only ones who fear Jesus and wish to get rid of him. There is another, who often does his best work while hidden.

The chief priests were ecstatic when Judas showed up *out of the blue*. It was a dark providence that brought together their plot and Judas' availability, and we know who orchestrated the connection. Now God used it after the fact, but it was not in its origination God's will. So if you want to go your own way like Judas, be assured: there is one waiting to enable the worst about you. And if Judas was not immune after three years with the Lord, neither are we.

The woman with the flask of fragrance wanted to show love and gratitude to Jesus; an opportunity came her way, and she took it. The chief priests and scribes plotted to do evil against Jesus; an opportunity came their way, and they took it. If you resist the grace that calls and choose evil, you will find help from below and welcome it because it furthers your desires. If you cooperate with God's grace and choose the good— which is to love and follow Jesus- you will find help from above to further your desires. And either way, God remains sovereign, and the two freely-chosen trajectories have different effects, short and long term.

I know what a danger it is to be a religious leader, to wear insignia and be in charge of the public interpretation of the Book. The danger is you begin to believe your job is to manage and protect God's people from disturbance. The Father is sending his Son to confront the nation, and the holy men of Israel are plotting his death! What's wrong with this picture? At times I pray: "Save me, O Lord, from being so busy managing the church that I miss you." The Living God reserves the right to act outside our expectations. The feast is imminent; Jerusalem is filling; authorities are plotting, and Mark writes with economy:

"It was now two days before Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. And *the chief priest and scribes* were seeking how to arrest Jesus by stealth, and kill him, for they said, 'Not during the feast, lest there be a tumult of the people.'"

**2) Jesus Honored: Anointing At Simon's House (vv.3-9).**

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**Mark 14:1-11. . . . . 8**

The same day, likely that evening, a dinner party is underway in Bethany, which sits aside the Mount of Olives just two miles away. Mark's shift of scenery is abrupt, from the halls of power to the home of Simon, from hostility to hospitality. There are two suppers featured in Mark, the Last Supper, and the meal at Simon's, the next-to-the-last-supper with its own distinctive flavor and smells.

The host had a nickname, Simon *the leper*. *Leper* has a sharp edge; it carries contempt and rejection. An equivalent might be Simon *the AIDS carrier*. Though we are not told, I believe Simon had been healed by Jesus and kept his nickname as a testimony.<sup>3</sup> What for others was a slur, Simon kept as a badge of honor. Not *Saint* Simon, but Simon *the leper*. Not Pastor Phil, but *Phil the...* Well, I know what to fill in for me; you fill in your own blank. Simon's name and nickname was his before and after; he was a walking example of God's restorative mercy.

Once Simon's house had been empty, the dwelling of an outcast who never felt a tender touch or the simple joy of friends over for a meal. He was locked away in a social and religious quarantine of leprosy. He was publically unclean, and folk wondered what great sin he or his parents committed for him to be so stricken, and for the disease in his soul to be visible in his skin.<sup>4</sup> But now, fresh pink skin replaced scabs and sores. A once ulcerated tongue now tasted carrots and sweet rolls. Simon laughed and cried each time he looked into the polished metal mirror. Each morning, when his feet hit the floor, he sang, "There is a name I love to hear, I love to speak his worth, it sounds like music in my ear, the sweetest name on earth. Oh, how I love Jesus... because he first loved me." "Simon *the leper*," he said to himself, "I think I'll keep the name and let folk ask me about it. Then I can tell them about Jesus."

So don't brag on your past, but don't hide it either. Your history may provide a bridge over which others can walk. Jesus had other friends in Bethany: Mary *the listener*, Martha *the workaholic*, and Lazarus *the corpse*, but this evening Simon *the leper* was host. Later on it was Peter *the coward* and Thomas *the doubter* and Paul *the persecutor*, but tonight at the next-to-last supper it was Simon *the leper*. Jesus is able to redeem all our histories, and to use our history as a foot bridge to others.

Mouths were full and cups lifted as they lay on couches for the upcoming

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<sup>3</sup> An individual leper (Matthew 8:1-4, Mark 1:40-44, Luke 5:12-14). Luke 17:11-19 records 10 lepers who were healed, only one of which returned to give thanks.

<sup>4</sup> See John 9, the man blind from birth, for a parallel case.

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discussion, a symposium.<sup>5</sup> Then there was the sound of glass breaking. The aroma of nard filled the air. It was all over before it could be stopped. The silence was that of disbelief, as when someone embarrasses themselves in public and no one knows what to say. Jesus lay propped on his left arm, drenched in the precious oil running down his face and beard, looking like one of the kings of old who were anointed to office by a prophet of God. There she stood, trembling, the broken vial in hand.

There's not too much more should could have done, short of taking off her clothes, that would have been any more socially inappropriate:

- She was *brazen*; she broke into a circle of men uninvited.
- She was *rude*; she anointed Jesus while he was eating.
- She was *unethically extravagant*; the nard—worth a year's wages—might have been sold and given to the poor. What a waste!
- She was *eccentric*; everyone knew guests were anointed on the feet, only kings and priests on the head.

Jesus said nothing; she said nothing. The silence between them was as full of love as the room with the aroma of the precious perfume. We do not know the story of what he brought to her; all we have is her extravagant response.

As soon as they recovered a bit from the shock, righteous indignation began to grow amidst the embarrassment. They couldn't believe their noses. Something must be said to restore decorum, "Why was this ointment thus wasted? It might have been sold for more than a year's wages and given to the poor." Mark summarizes the mob spirit that turned on her, "And they *reproached* her." The moral police issued a citation. Jesus must be protected from such women. Good manners are, after all, highly important, especially here in Greenwood!

Jesus' lips were taut, his eyes flashing anger. They'd seen the expression before. The day he called Peter *Satan* and the tongue-lashing for holding the children back. "Let her alone! Why do you trouble her? Are you really so concerned about the poor, or is it your propriety that's been offended?"

We all have our sense of what's socially appropriate, don't we? We get nervous

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<sup>5</sup> The fullest treatment is Dennis E. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet In The Early Christian World* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 2003), Chapter 8, "The Banquet in the Gospels," 219-278.

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when someone acts outside our comfort zone. Someone runs forward at an altar call and weeps. A visitor raises their hands during a song. We value passion in our marriages and sports and politics, but not our faith. We're more like the disciples than we admit. They'd been with Jesus three years now, had the inside line. But this is what it looks like when you lose your calling and go into *the preacher business* of managing appearances and counting the offering for the next do-good project.

I have an experiment for you. When alone, say out loud, "Jesus, I love you." Most will blush and feel stupid, especially the men. It may be the hardest thing you've ever done. Say it over and over. Then stop, and listen with the ears of your heart. You will hear a *Yes* coming back from the Holy Spirit who dwells within and whose job it is to blow the dusty coals back into a burning ember, then a raging fire.

Then listen again for the Spirit to show you some act of love you are to carry out. It may start with something as simple as, "Tell your wife you love her," or, "Apologize to your children," or, "Give an extra ten dollars at church." This church doesn't lack people, money, talent, preaching, or spiritual gifts. What we may lack is passion for Jesus, the kind of love this anonymous woman demonstrated. Everyone in the room said *No* to her; Jesus said *Yes*. Guess whose opinion counts?

This woman didn't understand the full significance of her actions. Love rarely does. Make no mistake; we are to do good, especially to the poor. But Paul, like Jesus, knew that you can give away all you have- and if not motivated by love, it's nothing.<sup>6</sup> Without renewed love for a Christ we know personally, our good works soon degenerate into calculations of how to do the most good for the most people with the limited resources, what the poet O'Reilly labeled "the organized charity, scrimped and iced, in the name of a cautious, statistical Christ."<sup>7</sup>

My observation is that our United Methodist Church, for all its strengths, is forever coming up with this or that big new ethical project because we've simply lost the faith that if people love Jesus Christ they will come up with all kinds of creative ways to do good without top-down demands. I almost get the impression we're trying to justify our existence before skeptics with a pile of projects. "We still deserve our tax exempt status; after all, look at all the good we do. Aren't we a great bunch?" The error is that it's no longer *look at Jesus* but *look at us!*

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<sup>6</sup> I Cor. 13:4.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Lamar Williamson, *Mark* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox, 1984), 249.

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**Mark 14:1-11. . . . . 11**

This woman saw what others missed: the supreme worth of Jesus. That she had such an expensive item indicates she was a matron of some social standing. I believe that such excesses of love are easily forgiven, not so the constricting composure and decorum that keeps piety under tight wraps in the deep freeze. Jesus immediately installs her in Heaven's Hall of Fame, "And truly, I say to you, wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her."

Beyond this meal is the cross, and beyond the cross the tomb, and beyond the tomb a resurrection, and beyond the resurrection a restored fellowship, and beyond the fellowship a world mission that all the world might know and hear the story of Jesus, with this woman as *Exhibit A* of what God is after. What God wants is your heart, because with that comes everything else about you. Anything less is holding back, even if it's full of good and necessary social services to the less fortunate.

**3) Hostility To Jesus: Judas And the High Priests (vv.10-11).**

Theories abound as to why Judas did what he did. Luke and John point to the invasive power of Satan and the door Judas opened from within. Matthew hints at greed. Mark never mentions the Evil One and leaves us with the impression money was not offered up front but only after Judas offered his services<sup>8</sup>:

"Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them. And when they heard it they were glad, and promised to give him money. And he sought an opportunity to betray him."

The plot is sealed. Caiaphas and his cohorts are delighted. They now have an inside informer; how convenient! Must be God helping us out! I don't think so! I think it's the other figure, the same one Jesus met for forty days of trial in the wilderness.

Was Judas' fate foreordained? Was he marching helplessly to an irresistible cadence and unable to break lockstep? I think not. Of all Jesus rebuked at the table, only one turned shame into betrayal, though by the end all fled in fear. In the mystery of his own inner counsel of freedom, Judas chose to take a risk- just like the unnamed woman- only in the opposite direction, *away from love*.

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<sup>8</sup> Marcus J. Borg & John Dominic Crossan, *The Last Week: A Day-by-Day Account Of Jesus' Last Week in Jerusalem* (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 2006), 105-107.

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Both Judas and the woman reacted to Jesus; neither was constrained by a prior heavenly decree. And after each had chosen, God used the choices and wove them into the fabric of the divine will. Her nard was his proper burial rite, and Judas' treachery would eventually deliver Jesus to the death squad. The anonymous woman is forever a model of discipleship, Judas the very opposite. She- an outsider- signed on, and he- an insider- signed out. Not only her story but his is also remembered and retold round the world. God's love reaches out to us through Jesus; how we respond determines our trajectory and destiny. God loves each and all, but God's purpose will be accomplished and God's glory undiminished whatever we choose.

I do not believe every detail is pre-rigged; strict determinism is not a Christian option because it kills the real drama of life in God's image. God knows all the combinations of all the possibilities, which means God is never caught off guard since all possibilities are foreseen. God never says, "I didn't see that one coming!" But not all possibilities are enacted, but only one at a time with genuine consequences as one avenue is opened up and another closed off. God's is a purpose, not a plan; a trajectory, not a blueprint. God is able to bring about his purposes by many paths.

Our God can turn any event to providential ends: nard on the head as an anointing for burial, betrayal for the sacrifice of the cross. Our ever-ingenious God gathers up the threads and weaves the pattern of divine purposes by including our free decisions. God's sovereignty is so large and comprehensive that no decision, however wicked, is able to thwart God's purposes. Whatever our move, God has a flanking position that bends it to serve divine ends. We are limited; God is not.

**CONCLUSION**

Do you identify with one or more characters? I do. They live within. I am at times the chief priest and scribe who guard privilege and keep things under control, managing God and keeping surprises which could mess with my career to a minimum. I am among those at the table, following Jesus but offended when someone displays more love for Christ than I can muster. I am Judas, sometimes angry I ever said Yes and looking for a profitable way out. And Yes, at times I am even the unnamed woman who loves and honors this Jesus who knows the meaning of my actions deeper than I myself. May God in ruthless grace starve all the others and feed only her. That we are retelling her story today is evidence the prophecy was true. It is a good thing to love and follow Jesus Christ. It is a treacherous and deadly thing to turn away from him. He is the living center of all that God is doing in the earth. He draws us to himself and into his kingdom with chords of love and nothing else.

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