

That's No Excuse!

John 12: 1-8

Six days before He would give His life as a ransom for many, Jesus and His disciples left their hideout in Ephraim and travelled to Bethany, the hometown of Simon the Leper. The disciples knew it was a dangerous thing to do. We can almost hear Thomas saying to the others "here we go again", yet they went out of loyalty and a sense of duty to the One they had been following for nearly three years. The difference was that Jesus now had a price upon His head, and the temple leaders had issued a command that anyone who knew where He was should report His whereabouts so He could be arrested.

Jesus was a wanted man, on the run for a terrible crime that He committed a few days earlier. The Gospel writer gives us the gruesome details in chapter 11 verses 38-44. It sounds crazy, but Jesus was now on the run not for murdering a man, but for doing just the opposite; bringing life to one who was dead.

Even so, Jesus was not about to miss Lazarus's party. In a way it was a birthday party, an opportunity to celebrate and give thanks for the miracle of new life that Lazarus had received by the words of Jesus. We can only imagine the immense joy that Mary and Martha were experiencing. There were no Dairy Queens in those days, yet they were eating, drinking and being merry; for the brother whom they had said their final goodbyes to was now sitting at the table with them. Have you ever wondered about what Lazarus thought about all of this? Martha's cooking was excellent but the food in heaven must have been thousands of times better. Even though it was a splendid party it was nothing like his visit to glory.

They were celebrating, and while the men were eating Mary brought out a large jar of pure nard she had purchased and began to anoint Jesus feet. Nard was very expensive, much like French perfume is today. To say it was expensive is an understatement. Using the federal minimum wage of \$ 7.25, today it would have been worth 300 day's wages, or \$17,400. Reading between the lines it seems this was not a poor family that Jesus was visiting.

The aroma of fine food mixed with scent of fine perfume filled the house and it wasn't long before someone began to complain. It wasn't just any old someone who voiced his concerns but Judas, the one who would betray Jesus with a kiss in just a few days. His complaint sounds reasonable and perhaps even familiar to us. He asks a pointed question that is just dripping with envy. Why wasn't this ointment sold and the money given to the poor? It was a fair question, especially since so much of Jesus ministry was directly focused towards those who had an inadequate ability to meet their needs. Just outside of the front door there were thousands of starving people in the city and it seemed that Mary had resources to meet those needs but didn't.

The problem isn't with the merit of the question but the motive for asking it. John quickly provides us a bit of information that is ever so important to understanding why Judas spoke up. Judas was a thief, one who would steal from the treasury for his own personal gain. The truth of the matter is that his actions betrayed his words. Judas was least concerned about the poor and most concerned about himself.

The same may also be said about the Pharisees and religious leaders in Jesus day. Part of the reason they were so angry about Jesus raising a man from the dead was that they were powerless to do so themselves. They were jealous. Jesus had become a direct threat to their possession of power, to their authority and to their comfortable way of life so they concocted a straw argument to justify their desire to kill Jesus. The problem was that they didn't consider the possibility that the one with power to raise a man from the dead could also raise Himself from the dead!

There are three key things we can learn from this passage. First, **Satan isn't the only one guilty of envy and anger.** If we do an honest evaluation, we might find a bit of Judas in ourselves. It is part of our nature as fallen people. I can hear Judas when I visit in the home of a very poor widow struggling to make ends meet and I can also hear him when I am visiting the homes of those with great means. I can see Judas as I look in my rearview mirror and recognize the eyes of an envious man when a shiny new Mercedes blows past me on the highway. Envy is a sinful thing and there is no excuse for us not to get rid of it.

The second thing we see is that **when it comes to malcontent, the problem usually is not the complaint but with the complainer.**

When we are tempted to grumble and complain about something, we should ask ourselves our motive for doing so. Are we sincerely trying to right a genuine wrong or are we like Judas, dishonestly hiding our sinful thoughts and self-centered motives behind holier-than-thou words? Are we like the Pharisees who whined and complained about this and groaned about that because they were losing their lofty positions of prominence and authority? Selfishness is a sinful thing, and there is no excuse for us not to get rid of it.

The third thing we see is this. Discontent is part of a fallen world and complaining is a part of our nature as fallen people. However, that is not an excuse that God will accept. 2 Corinthians 5:17 tells us why. When we choose to give our lives to Christ, we become a new creation, one that is no longer governed by selfishness and the evil desires of this world. So how new are you? My prayer this morning is that we will use these last two weeks of Lent to do some honest self-evaluation and see if there are still some old things in our lives that we have not yet given up for Jesus. Pride, selfishness, envy, power, perhaps even a tiny bit of greed every now and then?

Judas is a prime example of what can happen if we allow selfishness, envy and greed to rule our lives. They destroyed him and they have the power to destroy us. If you are like me and find that you still have some giving up to do, let us continue to pray for the Holy Spirit to help us fully become the new creation God wants us to be. If you truly believe that you are there, be thankful for that measure of grace, and be careful you don't find yourself becoming the old creation once again. There is no excuse...Amen