

Next Sunday will be Palm Sunday. A day when we remember how Jesus came to Jerusalem. We imagine hundreds of people entering the city to celebrate Passover. We see those who enthusiastically welcome Jesus, cheering for him. But there are also those who want to get rid of this troublemaker. Those who have religious power and can determine the destiny of people. It's really noisy in Jerusalem! Some are shouting „Hosanna!“, others will scream: „Crucify him!“

But today a crucial thing happens on the edge of this well-known story. In an insignificant place called Bethany.

It's a small village outside of Jerusalem where Jesus went.

He has some friends over there; Lazarus, Simon, and the sisters Maria and Martha. His friend Simon is still called „the leper“, to remember that Jesus healed him from his disease. It is a place where Jesus can relax, get some rest and breathe again. With his friends he can enjoy good food and gather new strength.

Let us hear from Mark, chapter 14:

3 While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard.

She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head.

4 Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, “Why this waste of perfume?”

5 It could have been sold for more than a year's wages and the money given to the poor.” And they rebuked her harshly.

6 “Leave her alone,” said Jesus. “Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me.

7 The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me.

8 She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial.

9 Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.”

[What a scandal]

They are having a meal, men among themselves. Then a woman, who was not invited (!) enters the room causing quite a bit of irritation. No one knows who she is and where she comes from. But suddenly she's there. And she acts. Although she remains silent, it seems that she knows what she is doing.

She's courageous and she doesn't seem to care a lot about the social conventions and traditions of her time. She takes a step towards Jesus, breaks the jar filled with expensive perfume and pours it on the head of Jesus. Only those from the upper class can afford such a precious product...

Did this rich woman make her way from her palace in Jerusalem to Bethany? We don't know exactly what she knew about Jesus.

We only hear that she leaves her elegant and rich world to disturb a banquet among friends.

[sharp critique]

„What are you doing?“ „Are you crazy?!?“ „What a waste! A perfume for 300 silver coins...

A whole family with children could have lived an entire year with this amount of money!

And you, you're just squandering this money... What's wrong with you? ... that's the way the apostles insult and snub her.

How humiliating. An embarrassing moment. The woman feels totally exposed. She was so sure about what she was doing, but now she seems completely misplaced.

[the right of the apostles]

But aren't the apostles right? Isn't it their job to fight injustice with all of what they have and who they are? Didn't Jesus command them: Take care of those at the end of the earning scale, the hungry, the needy, and the foreigners? Those who don't even have the means to get dressed. I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these sisters and brothers of mine, you did for me.' (Mt 25,40)

Yes! The apostles are still right! Jesus always had critical words for those who had become blind by wealth, luxury or social status, and he always stood up for the poor. Too often he was positioning himself against injustice.

[Jesus and the beautiful deed]

Let's take a closer look at Jesus. What is HE doing in this awkward situation? He could have reacted grumpy and harshly too, because this woman just entered this personal space without even asking.

But Jesus is able to defuse this situation sovereignly. In the end of the story, neither the rich woman nor the disciples, who wanted to help the poor, are left ashamed. Jesus is able to see and understand the mysterious and obscure acting of this woman.

„Leave her alone! She deed a good deed for me! And she anointed me in advance for my burial.”

Through the Spirit, Jesus is able to see that this woman has her very own way of expressing her adoration. And he acknowledges that it was her way of doing him good. We may also translate this verse as: „She did what she could. She did a good deed. Or we say: „a beautiful deed.“

Good deeds give sense to our lives. Beautiful deeds make our lives shine. We need both. We need an open mind and a warm heart for others, but we also need beauty in our lives! Jesus shows his friends what he sees in this woman. Her action said: Let's not rationalize love. Let's not always ask for the function or the purpose of love, let's not try to measure love! Let's just see this deed of love as it is!

[Jesus is the poor one]

”She has done something beautiful to me.“ Someone anoints his head with oil. That is like: Someone is filling up his glass with wine. Someone invites him to be the guest and to receive. A moment when he can receive affection and love. Jesus can smell the scent of this noble oil and he experiences an unexpected closeness. It makes him feel well. Jesus shows himself here as a poor person. He tells his friends around him: Look, the poor will always be with you, but I won't.

Jesus, the sovereign, Jesus, the one who resolves the situation with ease, HE shows himself as the needy. And even more: He shows himself threatened from death. Jesus is now the poor one.

And that's the reason why he can't be placed against the poor. That's the reason why both are true: The woman did something good to him. And the disciples are totally right when they insist that we always should do good to the poor!

Jesus gives an insight into his upcoming suffering and death. There is much to say about his statement: „She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial.“

[an anointing]

First, we can see that this woman anointed Jesus just as the prophets had anointed the kings in ancient times. But she didn't do this with mockery and malice, as the soldiers were to do to Jesus. Placing a crown of thorns over his head.

The woman's deed, which was full of care and love, portrayed Jesus as the king. The anointing with oil makes clear who Jesus is: He is THE anointed one, the Messiah, the Christ. Jesus is anointed like the kings of Old Israel. It is how the story of David, Israel's magnificent king, started – he was first anointed by Samuel.

However, Jesus is not a king like the others. He's not planning to reign with power. Even more, he refuses violence. By doing so, he forces the mighty to take a close look into the mirror. He is sent by the Almighty, but gives himself and all his life to this world – with all its consequences.

Isn't THAT a waste? That God puts Jesus under ridicule and embarrassment? That the perfect servant of God hangs unprotected and vulnerable on the cross?

The anonymous woman participated – without even knowing – in the movement from God towards us: With her commitment and dedication she exposed herself to embarrassment and she gave herself with her extravagant act of love for Jesus. That is how she moved with Jesus: Jesus, who committed himself entirely to love us unconditionally. It is the love to break the circle of power. The love to bring God close to us and never let Him go again. Ever.

[In remembrance]

Jesus says: „Take this bread. This is my body. Do this in remembrance of me.“ Jesus promises us that we can feel his entire love at the supper.

And he says: She has done a beautiful thing to me. [...] Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of *her*.”

That's the way how Jesus values this anonymous woman and gives her a permanent place in the story of God's coming. That is how he grants that she did the right thing in the right moment. That she acted in accordance to his Spirit.

And in this way, I think she can be an example for all of us: We also can use those moments when we spontaneously feel that someone needs our care and attention. Against all our fears and despondency that it could become an embarrassing moment. We can also trust our senses and follow them, when someone around us is poor – poor in goods or poor in love. Sometimes we may feel miserable trying to give love to one another. But when Jesus values the remembrance of this woman, when her beautiful deed lasted over the years, then our beautiful deeds also may count. In this way they are also a deed done to Jesus.
Amen.