

## Wednesday of Holy Week

So far, two momentous days have passed: On Monday there was Jesus' cleansing of the Temple and his lament over Jerusalem. On Tuesday we saw teachings by Jesus, Jesus being interrogated by his opponents and Jesus' response.

Today, Wednesday, Jesus stays in Bethany. In the background on this day, we learn that the chief priests and elders are meeting with the high priest to develop a plan to arrest Jesus secretly and kill him.

Jesus and the twelve disciples spend a quiet sort of day in Bethany, at the home of Simon the Leper. Two events are remembered today. The first is Jesus' anointing by a woman. (All four gospels report an anointing of Jesus but who was doing the anointing and why and when all differ. It may be that Jesus was anointed more than once.) This is how Matthew records it:

A woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, which she poured on his head as he was reclining at the table. When the disciples saw this, they were indignant. "Why this waste?" they asked. "This perfume could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor." Aware of this, Jesus said to them, "Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me. The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me. When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial. Truly I tell you, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her" (Matthew 26:7-13).

The second event remembered today is that it was on Wednesday night that Judas decides to betray Jesus. Matthew, Mark and Luke all agree on this day. This is how Matthew records it:

Then one of the Twelve—the one called Judas Iscariot—went to the chief priests and asked, "What are you willing to give me if I deliver him over to you?" So they counted out for him thirty pieces of silver. From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over (Matt 26:14-16).

So ends the Wednesday of Holy Week. It was a calmer day, a day spent among friends, yet a day when Jesus knows he's been anointed for his burial and his betrayal is set in motion.

### **Beginning Words for Your Wednesday Home-Worship and Devotions:**

*(I've retained the language in the plural as a way of affirming that though we are separated in body, we are together in spirit. These worship resources have been adapted from the Iona Community)*

We will remember the soothing, and not forget the jarring.  
We will remember the sweetness, and not forget the sour.  
We will remember the jagged desperateness of Judas, and own it. It is our story, too.  
We will remember the passion of love, the smell of perfume,  
The pain of rejection, the stench of blood money.  
And to help us on the journey, to help us hold the tensions,  
to help us face both the delight and the difficulty,  
We will say yes, to God's generosity in creation,  
We will say yes to God's judgement poured out on humankind,  
We will say yes to God's justice in Jesus.

## Reflection:

It was on Wednesday that they called him a wasteful person. The place smelled like the perfume department of a big store. It was as if somebody had bumped an elbow against a bottle and sent it crashing to the floor, setting off the most expensive stink bomb on earth.

But it happened in a house, not a shop. And the woman who broke the bottle was no casual afternoon shopper. She was the poorest of the poor, giving away the only precious thing she had.

And he sat still while she poured the liquid all over his head ... as unnecessary as aftershave of a full crop of hair and a bearded chin.

And those who smelled it, and those who saw it, and those who remembered that he was against extravagance, called him a wasteful person. They forgot that he also was the poorest of the poor.

And they who had much and who had given him nothing, objected to a pauper giving him everything.

Jealousy was in the air when a poor woman's generosity became an embarrassment to their tight-fistedness ...

That was on the Wednesday, when they called him a wasteful person.

## I Will Give What I Have: Poem in the voice of the woman who anointed Jesus

From a high, secret shelf, I take what I hid myself -  
Perfume, precious and rare, never meant to spill or spare.  
This I'll carefully break, this I'll empty for his sake:  
I will give what I have to my Lord.

Though the action is crude, it will show my gratitude  
for the truth that I've learned from the one who's heaven-sent;  
for this life once a mess which his beauty can express,  
I will give what I have to my Lord.

With his critics around, common gossip will abound.  
They'll note all that they see to discredit him and me.  
Let them smirk, let them jeer, say what people want to hear;  
I will give what I have to my Lord.

It's because he'll receive, that I believe  
God has time for the poor. He has shown us heaven's door.  
Be it perfume and care, be it anger or despair,  
I will give what I have to my Lord.