

# Fifth Sunday in Lent

HERE'S JESUS!

John 12:1-8

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Analysis by Lori A. Cornell

1 Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. 2 There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. 3 Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. 4 But Judas Iscariot, one of the disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, 5 "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" 6 (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) 7 Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. 8 You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."

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## DIAGNOSIS: Jesus, Taken for Granted

**Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem)** – *The Poor Will Always Be Here*

Was the jar of nard half empty or half full? To Judas that didn't matter. What did matter to him was that it could catch a good price at market, or so John tells us. Judas was worried that Mary's extravagance might cost him. It didn't matter that the nard belonged to Mary to do with as she saw fit; it likely

didn't matter to him that because of her prodigious act, the poor might have one less meal on their plates. What mattered to Judas was that Mary's generosity didn't serve his purposes.

We're no different than Judas. When generous acts benefit others we might admire and appreciate them outwardly, but if we want to benefit from that generosity, we wonder why it didn't come to us. We may even misattribute our frustration; maybe we blame the giver for her shortsightedness, instead of say what we really mean: "I want that for me." We rationalize our selfishness, believing that taking care of #1 (me, me, me) is just for today; after all, the poor will always be with us still tomorrow. But tomorrow comes, and we still look out for #1. No wonder the poor are always with us (v. 8)!

### **Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) – *Jesus Will Always Be Here***

We fail to take care of the poor, who are always with us. Worse, we neglect them precisely because they are persistently present. (We can always serve them tomorrow. They're sure to be around then too.) But if that's the way we treat the poor—who likely will not ever benefit us personally, why wouldn't we treat Jesus similarly—though he can benefit us? It never entered Judas' mind that Jesus could be worth the costly gesture Mary made toward him (v. 7). Likewise, in our day-to-day walk with Jesus, we too easily forget how much he is worth to us and the world. In fact, unlike Mary, Martha, and Lazarus—who had smelled the stench of death closely enough to fear its consequences and appreciate its defeat—most of us treat Jesus' life-giving, death-betraying ministry as some sort of promissory note, rather than our debt paid in full. And, so, rather than living gratefully, we take Jesus for granted. "Just like the poor," we say cavalierly, "Jesus will always be with us."

### **Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) – *Wait! Where's Jesus!***

But will he? If we regularly forsake the one who will never leave us nor forsake us, is he always with us (v. 8)? Or, are we, instead, forsaken? Left to our own devices, this is most certainly true.

## **PROGNOSIS: Jesus Granting: We Are Taken**

### **Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) – Here Is Jesus!**

The wonder of the gospel, however, is that God won't leave us to our own devices. In fact, the cross and empty tomb declare that, though we may betray, neglect, and ignore God's love, he is ever speaking forgiveness from the cross through Jesus: "Father forgive them, they do not know what they are doing." It is a prayer that condemns our betrayal, neglect, and ignorance. But it is more especially a word that offers new life: The promise of new life, and the pay off, already. Jesus' death and resurrection are a lavish gift (like costly nard) anointing our lives and preparing us for death and the empty tomb. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus is spent on us, even though there must certainly be others are more worthy of God's attention. That's why we're crossed with oil at our baptisms, a subtle sign of God's extravagant gift in Christ. A royal seal to make us worthy of God's attention when we stand at heaven's gate.

### **Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) – Jesus Will Always Be with Us**

The lavish gift is for us, not because of who we are, but because of what Christ has done: "Child of God, you have been sealed with the Holy Spirit, and marked with the cross of Christ forever." Forever. It's a promise that is always with us. A promise too good to take for granted. So, instead of saving it for a rainy day, we cash in on it daily: We live in the promise, trusting that because Jesus is God's mercy, we have God's mercy today. Like a person in recovery ("my name is Lori, and I'm a

recovering sinner”), in faith, we don’t think in terms of forever, we accept Christ’s mercy one day at a time. We rise in the morning, remind ourselves of who we are (call it repentance), and we give thanks for who God is in Jesus (call it gratitude).

**Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) – *The Poor Will Always Be with Us***

That’s not where the gratitude ends, though. See, while Jesus’ lavish mercy has been spent on us, others still live in the poverty of a life without Christ. Perhaps their spirits are bankrupt by the looking-out-for-#1 mentality of our culture. Or, perhaps, they don’t know where their next meal is coming from. Either way they’re impoverished. (The poor will always be with you, v. 8.) And we possess riches too many to count. So, just as we remember daily that Christ is with us, we remember that the poor are with us and, thankful, we respond.