

MARK 14: 1-11
THE ANOINTING WOMAN

14 It was two days before the Passover and the festival of Unleavened Bread. The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him; ² for they said, “Not during the festival, or there may be a riot among the people.”

The Anointing at Bethany
(Mt 26.6—13; Jn 12.1—8)

³ While he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment of nard, and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment on his head. ⁴ But some were there who said to one another in anger, “Why was the ointment wasted in this way? ⁵ For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor.” And they scolded her. ⁶ But Jesus said, “Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me. ⁷ For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me. ⁸ She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial. ⁹ Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.”

Judas Agrees to Betray Jesus
(Mt 26.14—16; Lk 22.3—6)

¹⁰ Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them. ¹¹ When they heard it, they were greatly pleased, and promised to give him money. So he began to look for an opportunity to betray him.

The episode of the anointing woman is framed between scenes of plotting death and betrayal. The woman stands in sharp contrast to those with authority (symbolize in the chief priest and scribes) and those who believe they have a special and privileged relationship to Jesus (symbolized by Judas and disciples). Mark presents the last hours of Jesus as one who is enjoying the hospitality of a man with leprosy named Simon. There is no indication of a physical cure. The “miracle” or significance of the event is uncovered in the ease at which Jesus enters into the house of Simon to receive the gracious gesture of the anointing woman whose actions offend the gathered neighborhood. Jesus is no obstacle to serving the poor. He has, in fact, become homeless and poor himself. His service and dedication to the victims of poverty and injustice has resulted in his homelessness, poverty, and victimization by injustice. In this condition of hostility, Jesus defends the anointing woman by daring to declare that the Gospel itself will be a cause for proclaiming *her* deed and *her* memory.

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