

Our Choices
A Sermon by Chris Hensley
Based on Isaiah 43:16 – 21 & John 12:1 – 8
Presented to Sardis Baptist Church
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We are taking a bit of a hiatus from our readings in the Gospel according to Luke and we step out of the Synoptic tradition and move to the Johannine tradition. Just as a reminder as we are talking about the four Gospel accounts found within the Christian Testament, they can be divided into two sub categories: the Synoptic Gospels and John. Synoptic derived from Greek and essentially meaning “seeing with one eye.” That to say that Matthew, Mark, and Luke – known collectively as the Synoptic Gospels – while not being verbatim copies of one another, share many qualities and apparent source material while John seems to draw from more unique sources regarding the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Our Christian Testament passage contains two interesting choices which the followers of Jesus make. First is the choice of Mary to use an expensive perfume with which to anoint Jesus. The second is Judas’ apparent frustration at the money spent on the perfume not going to nobler and more pressing matters such as caring for the poor. The author of the text gives us their own interpretation of Judas’ motivations. It is worth noting that in

Matthew's account of a similar story all of the disciples sided with Judas' thoughts which were expressed in our reading for this morning.

We will explore these choices in reverse order as they are presented in the text. Judas' argument that the perfume, worth approximately 300 denarii which is about the same purchasing power of approximately \$290 today. This sum would not solve any lasting problems, though it could feed someone and even several persons for a week or more if used wisely. It is a fair question, "why not use the meager wealth we have available to provide for those with even less?" Jesus responds to Judas with a startling statement, "you will always have the poor."

What a discouragingly true statement which Jesus utters. Unfortunately, we have not achieved the post-scarcity society which is envisioned in Gene Roddenberry's vision of humanity's future in his Star Trek franchise. Poverty exists everywhere, in all cultures, and in all regions of the world. Of course it manifests itself differently depending on where you look. In the global south we see people living in literal dumps, surrounded by garbage and in homes made of refuse. In the United States we have unhoused persons and people living in homes which are filled with holes and house more than their human occupants and the traditional pets. We also see working poor who, for all intents and purposes, present as "middle class" though are a major injury or job loss away from being unhoused themselves. All of this to say, Jesus was

absolutely right we seem to have the poor with us, always. Perhaps Roddenberry's vision is nothing more than a fantasy of the highest order.

When we look to Judas' choice, regardless of his motivations, it is a legitimate question of why the resources were not better or more intentionally spent on ensuring the Kin-dom of God was seen and felt in the here and now by supporting the work described in Matthew 25, that of feeding the hungry, visiting the sick, and so on. On the surface, it is an important question to ask whenever the followers of Jesus make any decisions.

Turning to the earlier choice in our reading, that of Mary's choice to use this expensive nard to anoint Jesus. Our Isaiah passage seems to give Mary's choice some extra weight. While Judas' question is legitimate, Mary's choice is also legitimate when we examine her motivations and intentions as well as take into consideration the Hebrew Bible and the interpretations which Christians lean into regarding the salvific work of God in and through the person of Jesus Christ. Mary's decision, her choice to worship Jesus through the use of this expensive perfume and the act of preparing his body by using her own hair, reveals that she is recognizing something unique and important in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. This is more than simply offering thanks to Jesus for raising her brother, Lazarus, from the dead as was recorded one chapter earlier. This is an act of worship of a being whose special purpose has been revealed to hold significance for not only Mary, but all people. Mary's act

of anointing Jesus reflects a Divine anointing of Jesus which has already occurred.

Our choices in this life reflect the investments which we make. Our choices reveal to others what is most important to us in our lives. As Mumford and Sons say, “where you invest your love, you invest your life.” Mary made her choice to invest her love in the person of Jesus the Christ. Her act of worship, while it could have instead fed the poor for about a week, revealed to those around her that her life is dedicated to Jesus Christ and his teachings which include ministering with the poor. As a practical theologian, I am on the side of Judas in this passage. Yes, the money could have been used to care for the poor. At the same time, I firmly believe that when we pursue a deep and intentional relationship with the Divine, however that manifests in our individual journeys, then we are actively becoming better equipped to minister with the poor in ways that outlast and outweigh that relatively small gift. As we engage with the Divine with intentionality, we become better equipped to help realize the salvific work of the Divine in the here and now and bring to fruition the Kin-dom of God in our world. May we all find time to engage with the Divine – to worship, reflect, and simply be with the Divine – and find refreshment to continue the good work of Kin-dom building in our lives.