

# that you may BELIEVE

Sermon-Based Study Guide  
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

John 12.1-19 | March 20, 2016

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## I. Introduction to this Study

This week we continue our series *That You May Believe*, engaging Jesus' preparation for and entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.

## II. Connecting with One Another

Have you ever received an expensive gift? How did you respond?

Have you ever witnessed someone else received one? How did they respond?

Have you ever given one? How did it feel?

## III. Study the Text

- a. Before engaging the passage before us in this study, recall that in John 11 the religious authorities resolved to kill Jesus because he raised Lazarus from the dead. Pick up where we left off, reading John 11.55-11.57, then read ahead: John 12.9-11.

It has been written that "such bracketing suggests simultaneous action: while the Judeans were looking for Jesus and eventually found him, Jesus was at a meal" (which we will engage here).

Before continuing, however, ponder why John would bracket this passage in this way. What purpose does doing so serve? What do you expect to occur during this meal!?

- b. Read John 12.1-3.

At the outset of John 12, we are presented with the time, place, and cast of characters.

First, we read that it was "six days before the Passover." This important Jewish holiday celebrated God's liberation of the Israelites from slavery under ancient Egyptians.

Read about the first Passover in Exodus 12.

What themes do you see in Exodus 12 that are engaged later in the Hebrew and/or Christian Scriptures?

How are they reinterpreted in light of Jesus' mission?

Have you ever had a kind of "Passover experience" where you were freed from some difficulty in your life?

- c. After being presented with the timing, the geographical location and cast of characters are closely intertwined: "Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead."

Recall that Lazarus *had* been known as "the one whom Jesus loved" (see John 11.3, 5, 36), but is now given a new title (used again in verse 9).

Why do you think John does this? Do you think John intends to point forward to Jesus' resurrection?

Do you think one title is better than the other? If so, which is better? Why?

- d. One scholar clarifies the background of this passage this way: "the streets where people walked were little more than open sewers, and since reclining guests would often be in close proximity to the feet of those near them, it was customary among elites to have slaves wash the feet of guests before a meal. What happens here is another matter."

Recall from last week's study that Lazarus, Mary, and Martha may have been quite well-to-do. While wealthy hosts of a dinner party (in all probability, Mary herself), would not normally deal with the problem of foot odor, Mary anoints Jesus' feet with ointment worth nearly a year's wages.

How do you think the guests should react to this action of Mary's?

Perhaps just as importantly, why?

- e. Anointing was common in ancient rituals. For instance, when one became a prophet, priest, or king, their head was commonly anointed with oil. Or, to symbolically prepare a dead body for transitioning from being a family member to an ancestor, their whole body would be anointed.

In this setting, however, only Jesus' feet are anointed. Why do you think this is?

What could that signify?

- f. One biblical scholar explains the importance of feet in ancient Mediterranean culture: "Hands and feet were considered the zone of *purposeful action*, the zone of external behavior or interaction with the environment. It is the zone of activity – of doing, performing, making" (see, for example, Isaiah 52.7). As such, "the story points to a ritual of forthcoming transformative action. Jesus is about to do something of singular significance. As rather wealthy mistress of the house, Mary of Bethany takes it upon herself to acknowledge and affirm Jesus' forthcoming significant action."

What do you think Mary had in mind?

Recalling that it was worth a day-laborers annual wages, what would you have thought of her action? Why?

- g. In verse 4, we encounter a disciple's reaction. Reread John 12.1-3, then continue on through verse 5.

What do you make of Judas' objection? What if Matthew said it? What if it was Peter?

If it were someone other than Judas would it make any difference? Why or why not?

- h. Read John's explanation of Judas' intentions in John 12.6.

The "money bag" or "common purse" was important for pilgrims to the Jerusalem temple as they transported money for temple taxes and alms. It is made clear here that Judas didn't care about the poor at all. On the contrary, he wanted money for himself.

How do you think the disciples should respond to him? How about Jesus?

- i. Read John 12.7-8.

In verse 7, Jesus declares, "It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial."

What do you think Jesus means by this?

- j. How have you heard Jesus' statement in verse 8 interpreted by others?

What do you think it means?

After first thinking through the above questions, turn to and carefully read Deuteronomy 15.1-11. Notice that in John 12.8 Jesus is quoting Deuteronomy 15.11. How does this reframe your understanding of what Jesus is saying?

- k. How do you think the disciples understood the second half of verse 8, "you will not always have me"?

How do you think Mary heard this?

How do you think Judas heard it?

- l. Read John 12.9-11.

Why do the religious authorities want to kill Lazarus, too?

- m. Read John 12.12-13.

A possible connection with palm branches is found in Leviticus 23.33-44, where Moses instructs the Israelites on celebrating the Festival of Tabernacles. Why do you think the earliest disciples of Jesus were prompted to remember this passage as Jesus enters Jerusalem?

- n. In verse 13, the "great crowd" celebrates Jesus' entry into Jerusalem by reciting Psalm 118.25-26. First century tradition held that the high priest should then welcome the Messiah by reciting the second half of Psalm 118.26: "From the house of the Lord we bless you."

After all we've studied in John's gospel, why do you think the high priest "forgot" his line? (For help on this one, reread John 12.9-11)

- o. Read John 12.14-19.

In verse 15, John quotes Zechariah 9.9, but then states, "At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him and that these things had been done to him."

When have you understood things better in hindsight?

How does reflecting upon your spiritual journey help you welcome Jesus into your life?

#### IV. Pray

- a. Lift up the many guests who will join us in worship next Easter Sunday, that they would hear God's Word proclaimed in a way they can understand and commit to following Jesus,
- b. Pray that God would reveal to you and lead you to invite a friend, co-worker, neighbor, or family member to our Easter celebration,
- c. Ask God to reveal ways that we could better welcome Jesus into our own lives.