

**The Reverend Jon Hauerwas – April 7, 2019 – “Poured Out”
Isaiah 43:18-21 and John 12:1-8**

We should probably start in the beginning. Or, more specifically, at Christmas. Luke tells the story of Jesus’ humble birth. His parents, Mary and Joseph, are travelling without connections and without reservations. Mary is 9 months pregnant. She is exhausted and aching. Joseph, sensing that his beloved has had enough for one day, approaches an innkeeper and quickly learns that there is no room for guests in the main house.

Still, a glimmer of hope remains when the owner tells them that he has a second guesthouse out back. And after motioning for them to follow, he leads them to what he calls his “more rustic accommodations.” The couple, who once attended a wedding at Conrad Botzum Farmstead, hope that this setting has also been converted. But, they are terribly disappointed when the barn door flings open. The place smells like manure and is home to countless, unseen bugs that scurry about on the hay.

The owner raises his arms to gesture toward the room’s meager amenities, and then skillfully uses his body to shield the health department’s most recent findings. “This will do, right?” he says, smiling broadly and standing as confidently as a host

in a grand ballroom. “The price is right,” he tells them. Sadly, the couple has no choice. They reach into a sack, retrieve a few coins, and give them to innkeeper who guides them into his pocket as he has done countless times before. Before they can ask any questions, he slips off into the night.

Friends, this is how it all began. And it is here, in squalor, that Jesus is born. In Matthew’s telling, Jesus’ humble birth is quickly followed by the arrival of wise men from the east. They bring gold, frankincense, and myrrh and bow before the tiny infant as if he was a king. Yet, despite these royal gestures, Jesus’ “humility and poverty distinguish the type of Messiah he will become.”¹ For he is one whose kingdom is not of this world.

Irish scholar John Dominic Crossan asserts that “there was no middle class in ancient societies.” Instead, “between 95 and 97 percent of the Jewish state was illiterate at the time of Jesus.”² It is reasonable, then, to assume that Jesus’ Artisan family was poor and illiterate, as well, like the vast majority of their contemporaries.

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¹ Liz Theoharis, *Always with Us? What Jesus Really Said about the Poor*, (William B. Eerdmans, 2017), 77.

² *Ibid.*, 76.

³ *Ibid.*, 76.

Now moving on from the birth narrative, we fast-forward to the final phases of Jesus' earthly ministry. In our second lesson this morning, he is in the home of Lazarus, a man who died, was buried, and whom Jesus raised from the tomb. That our current narrative is set here is no coincidence. The air is thick with hints of Holy Week.

In the home of Lazarus, Jesus is joined by a woman named Mary who brings a gift in keeping with his royal birth. It is a bottle of perfume. VERY expensive perfume. More specifically, it is myrrh, used to anoint kings and to prepare bodies for burial.⁴ She empties the bottle on Jesus' feet, overwhelming the home with its aroma.

In this moment, we remember his birth, where myrrh from the east was used to anoint him as king. When opened, it would overpower the unseemly odors of his barnyard crib. And now, the stench of Lazarus' death is overwhelmed by the same, sweet perfume. The symbolism of the occasion is lost on Judas, who will one day betray him. But, it resonates deeply with Jesus who praises Mary for her devotion.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 50.

As Liz Theoharis maintains, Mary “does not use her gift to Jesus to lift herself up, as gifts are used by patrons; her luxury item does not help her produce more power, wealth, or status at the expense of others. On the contrary, her gift serves to comfort and acknowledge a humble but worthy poor person/messiah and her commitment to his way.”⁵ She understands that “Jesus is a leader and ruler, a king and Christ/Messiah.”⁶

“Jesus is poor. He is not a patron, benefactor, or wealthy leader/king like Caesar, Pharaoh, or other ruling authorities. His ruling authority does not rest on an accumulation of wealth and political power. Instead, Jesus is a new kind of savior, lord, and ruler: a savior of the poor who is poor himself.”⁷

Thus, when Jesus says, “The poor you will have with you always, but you will not always have me,” he is not only reminding his followers of God’s Old Testament commands “to forgive debts, release slaves, and be generous with one’s possessions. He is also reminding his followers that he is soon to be executed for his vision of God’s Kingdom on earth and his practice of these very commandments, as demonstrated through his feedings and healings; his teaching on what to do about

⁵ *Ibid.*, 113.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 77.

wealth and taxes; his disruption of the Temple; and his audacity to do all of this while being poor himself.”⁸

Soon, Jesus will enter Jerusalem and partake in the Last Supper with his disciples. He will bathe their feet, much like Mary has bathed his. His journey will lead to his betrayal, arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane, his trial the royal courts, flogging in the jail, and the pain of Golgotha, where he will die as humbly as he was born, on a crude, wooden cross surrounded by common criminals.

In the home of Lazarus, all that Mary has is poured out for him. And at the site of his crucifixion, all that Jesus has is poured out for us. Thanks be to God. Amen.

⁸ *ibid.*, 98.