

Monday Evening Bible Reading Group: March 23rd: Mark 14:1-11: Some Notes

I have suggested quite short sections for our reading of Chapter 14. I hope you find this helpful rather than irritating; and apologies if you would have preferred something longer.

- 1) Jesus' enemies in high places are probably torn between wanting to stop him stirring things when Jerusalem is crowded with some 3 million Jews and Jewish sympathisers, and not wanting to pounce on him in case his supporters riot. This was the point in the year at which the Roman troops had moved from their base at Caesarea to a fortified post near the Temple, ready to deal with crowd trouble.
- 2) Accommodation for the Passover and for the Feast of Unleavened Bread which followed was free, but Jerusalem could not accommodate everyone, so Bethpage and Bethany were over-flow centres. The different Gospel accounts leave uncertainties about who was staying where and who did what; and we can't be certain about these things. But in Mark's account, Jesus is eating at the house of Simon the Leper (not with Martha, Mary and Lazarus), and an un-named woman spends a small fortune on anointing Jesus – which scandalises some of those present but draws a commendation from Jesus.
- 3) Judas sells out to the Jerusalem conspirators, and gives them (at a price) the inside information they need. Some commentators suggest Judas sold not only Jesus' whereabouts but also Jesus quotes to hold against him in his trial.

It is not easy to grasp the scale and significance of the Passover. Males living within 15 miles of Jerusalem were expected to attend. All Jewish males, living anywhere in the world, wanted to attend at least once in their lives. The estimate of 3 million attending comes from the rough count of 256,500 lambs being slaughtered: 10 people per lamb. The Passover was about salvation/liberation/exodus/death of the oppressors – so nationalist as well as religious fervour. Psalms were sung (especially psalms 120-134), roadside sepulchres were white-washed to help pilgrims avoid touching them and making themselves unclean. High tension. It perhaps seems odd that the authorities, who had been monitoring Jesus for a long time, couldn't pick him out and pick him up without recruiting a traitor; but think Notting Hill Carnival all over London, and a culture where privacy just didn't exist. The collaborators with the Romans were probably a very tiny minority.

The gathering at a leper's house is fascinating. Can't imagine lepers being popular hosts, though a wide range of skin conditions got labelled leprosy. The un-named woman did the equivalent of emptying and breaking a bottle of vintage champagne. Something you did for a very special person on a very special occasion, or, if you could afford it, to anoint a dead close friend. Extravagant Love. The hostile reactions were understandable: Jesus and the Early Church would normally have encouraged giving a year's earnings to relieve poverty rather than for an unexpected shampoo. No precise

parallels, but we might look askance at giving a stained glass window to the church when the food bank was desperate for supplies?

Extravagant love juxtaposed with dastardly betrayal. Why did Judas do what Judas did? Perhaps the only disciple not from Galilee? Perhaps jealous of the Peter, James and John in-group? Perhaps a zealot determined to force the hand of Jesus? Perhaps in a financial mess and seeing only the short-term advantage of having some ready cash? Perhaps stolen by the Devil, and unable to resist? Perhaps pre-destined by God for a task that had to be done by somebody? Perhaps Judas didn't seek out the opposition; perhaps they sought him out and had some dirt on him.... had he been miss-using the funds? (The reaction when Judas knew what he had really done suggests that this wasn't a petty crook on the make!)

We aren't all that likely to sell Jesus in quite this way; but we are maybe sometimes not whole-hearted in our "Stand up, Stand up, For Jesus!"?