

March 31: John 12-14

### Chapter 12

Chapter 12 begins the book of glory. We no longer hear about amazing signs, from this point forward Jesus is focused on his glorification on the cross and all the events that lead up to that. In John's gospel, Jesus dies on the day of preparation for the Passover, when the lambs were being slaughtered. So, this feast at Lazarus' house (a thank you for raising Lazarus?) takes place on the Sunday before Good Friday, "Palm Sunday" happens on Monday in John's gospel. Mary and Martha embody the roles we're familiar with from their story in Luke's gospel –Martha serves and Mary takes up her roles as his disciple. Pure nard was very costly, this would have been the equivalent of a whole year's wages. The money for this likely was her inheritance or her dowry. She sacrifices all she has to give a great gift to Jesus, who knows he is facing death this week. When she wipes the excess off with her hair, her hair was also a symbol of her beauty, a sign of her whole self –and a totally immodest, inappropriate thing for her to do for a man who was not her husband. Mary acts as a prophet in this story, foreshadowing the foot washing that Jesus will lead his disciples in in chapter 13, as well as anointing Jesus' body properly for burial, as he will miss out on the normal ways of experiencing a respectful burial because of the shameful way he will die. We're reminded by the author that Judas is not only the betrayer, but also a thief... boo.... Hiss! And we're also told now that Lazarus is also famous because of being raised from the dead, and as a result his life is also being threatened by the Jewish religious authorities. We don't know how that thread of the story concludes.

The next day, perhaps 100,000 people entered Jerusalem with Jesus. This is a messianic procession, they are naming Jesus as their king. Waving palm branches was a militaristic symbol of victory. This would perhaps be akin to waving patriotic flags today. This is not the kind of thing that Rome would be happy about. No wonder the authorities say "the whole world has gone after him!" These 100,000 pilgrims would be Diaspora Jews from all around the world! What's more, we're told that even Gentiles are inquiring about Jesus! Jesus connects this request to his own mission, to draw ALL PEOPLE to himself when he is lifted up. The crowd continues to misinterpret Jesus' message. They don't realize that he's not the kind of Messiah they were expecting. Jesus goes back into hiding, frustrated that he'd performed so many signs and they still didn't believe in him. We're also told there are even a good number among the powerful who believe, but don't have the courage to wear their faith in public because they don't want to face the condemnation of the Pharisees. They prefer human glory to Jesus' sacrificial glory.

### Chapter 13

This chapter begins "The Testament of Jesus" from chapters 13-17, where Jesus will attempt to teach his disciples everything he wants them to remember before he goes to die. These chapters contain some of Jesus' most famous teachings, and begins with the reading we're all familiar with from Maundy Thursday. Maundy Thursday got its name from the Latin mandatum –commandment- for the new commandment Jesus teaches his disciples on this night before he dies. The new commandment, of course, is for his disciples to love one another... and that love is inspired by and rooted in Jesus' own love

for them. We're told in vs. 1, "He loved them to the end." And Jesus shows that by washing their feet, just as Mary anointed his feet in the previous chapter. Foot washing was a normal and necessary part of life at this time, when everyone walked around dusty streets in sandals. It was common place for hosts to offer their guests water and towels for them to clean and refresh their own feet as they entered the feast. Foot washing was viewed as so demeaning and disgusting that only slaves could be forced to wash guests' feet, and certainly no free person would ever wash another free person's feet. Jesus shows his disciples the extent he is willing to go in love for them, before he goes to the cross, by washing all of their feet in humble service. If the master is willing to wash feet, then there's no job too messy or gross for a disciple to engage in for the sake of love. We are called to lives of humble service for the sake of one another and our neighbors.

The drama in this chapter between Jesus and Judas comes to a head, with Jesus telling his disciples that one of them would betray him. Judas is described as being entered by Satan, who was the driver of Judas' betrayal. This all seems to work together as necessary parts of Jesus' glorification. After Judas leaves, Jesus begins teaching the rest of them what he wants them to know about what discipleship will be like without him. The rest of his disciples seems confused or dismayed at the idea that Jesus will be going away from them, and that even though they've been following him all this way, they can't follow him to where he's going now. From this moment forward, the way disciples of Jesus are identified is through their self-sacrificial (agape) love for one another. We are to love one another –even the ones who irritate us to no end- just as Jesus loves us. This is a world-changing teaching.

#### Chapter 14

This chapter is perhaps best known as a funeral reading, but think of the comfort these words offer to not only those who are mourning, but to those who are bewildered about what the future holds. Jesus begins by urging us to not let our hearts be troubled. "Believe" is the same Greek word as "trust". We have nothing to fear as we trust God and trust Jesus, that relationship of trust is rooted in the self-sacrificial love Jesus has already demonstrated and will continue to demonstrate for his disciples. Jesus promises that –in the fullness of time- all of his disciples will be gathered into his household, where they belong. We are reminded that we know the creator of the universe through what we know of Jesus, for Jesus and the Father are one. The same argument that Jesus has used for the Pharisees all this time, is now turned toward Philip –if you can't believe what I'm telling you based on my words, then at least believe based on the works you yourself have witnessed me perform. Beginning in Vs. 12, Jesus offers us one of the most amazing promises in all of the Bible –a promise the church is quick to forget. Jesus promises that those who believe (trust) in him will do even greater works than what Jesus has done!!! Jesus only performed his works with a limited crowd, in a limited place, at a limited point in history, but the movement that his life, death, and resurrection began have spread his works of love all over the world, touching billions upon billions of people throughout history with God's life-saving, life-giving love. Jesus promises that he will fulfill whatever we "ask in his name." For some Christians this has become a necessary formula for signing off at the end of prayer, but what Jesus means in this passage is that he will fulfill whatever we ask that is in line with his character and teachings. If we are asking Jesus for a million dollar jet, that's not in line with Jesus'

character of humble service, but if we are asking Jesus for the resources that we actually need to continue sharing his love with our neighbors, or for a way to be opened for us to move our mission forward, then Jesus promises to fulfill that. Furthermore, in vs. 16 we're introduced to the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus promises to send to be with us forever and remind us of all that Jesus taught. The Holy Spirit is our comforter and empowerer for the eras to come. Through the promise of the Spirit's presence with us, Jesus gives his disciples the gift of his peace. We will see this in the resurrection, when the Spirit in John's gospel is breathed out on them as Jesus' own breath when he says "Peace be with you." We have nothing to fear, because Jesus gives us what we truly need, and offers us peace to overcome all that is ahead.