

A Sermon Preached by
Fr. Ralph Osborne for the Fifth Sunday in Lent, Year C
March 21, 2010 at St. Thomas Church, Menasha, Wisconsin |
[Isaiah 43:16-21](#) | [Psalm 126](#) | [Philippians 3:4b-14](#) | [John 12:1-8](#)

When we have our confession each Sunday, we confess to sinning against God in thought and word and deed. This is how we work. It is difficult to sin if our thoughts and words and deeds are not in it. Today we have a lesson with two great character studies. Both key characters do what they do in thought, word and deed.

The stage is set in Bethany, maybe a forty five minute walk from Jerusalem. It is probably the day before Palm Sunday and Jerusalem is packed. People have been coming to the city for days and there is no room at the inn. Jesus, against all advice has made his way to Jerusalem. HE had been warned. They were planning on killing him and he was only making it easier. All his thoughtful friends had been warning him to avoid Jerusalem at all costs.

Since there are no rooms in the inn, Jesus is staying at the house of friends in Bethany. We know them. There is Lazarus who not long before had been pulled from the tomb after being dead for three days. There is Martha, and you biblical studiers know what she is doing, she is fixing supper and serving. Jesus and the disciples are laying about the table eating the good food that Martha has prepared. Mary, has been suspiciously absent for the last few minutes. Then we see her. She has steeled herself to walk right over to him. She kneels at his feet, breaks the top of the jar and begins to pour the expensive perfume on his feet and rubs it in and wipes him with her hair. She is the main character.

The second character is one of the men watching all this take place. It is Judas. Mary showed him the money and he didn't like what she did with it. He puts on his best indignant scowl and announces the correct words. Why was this not sold and the money given to the poor.

Judas sinned in thought, word and deed. He is just a few days away from his final betrayal of his friend. He had been thinking and scheming about how to make more money. He has been sinning in word, using his tongue to set up the situation to betray Jesus. At this dinner his words have betrayed his own sin. The deeds have already been done with his stealing from the common purse and he would later commit the deed of final betrayal.

Now Mary, who is our main character today, loved. Mary loved in thought, word and deed. You can't tell me she hadn't been planning this for some time. Jesus said she did it to anoint Jesus for his burial. I don't know if he read her mind, or if this was his take on her actions and there was even more in her heart. She had been planning this act of love. The word part needs a bit of imagination. The text doesn't tell us she talked to Jesus while she did the anointing. It doesn't tell us she was silent. Had she told anyone else she was going to do it? Did she lean forward and whisper to Jesus how she felt about him? I think she did and I think he whispered to her. She definitely loved in deed. Her act was such an extravagant and self-sacrificing act of love. It is so selfless and vulnerable that we almost get embarrassed for her.

It is a sacrifice, it is a Lenten discipline to practice loving others in thought, word and deed. How are we going to show love today? Think about it. What can you do to or for someone else to show how much you love them? What can you do today to express your love for God? Mary took the equivalent of a years wages to buy or save for that perfume. She had to plan and save. Today is a day to begin plans to show your love for God and for someone else that God directs you to.

Next, I challenge you to speak or write your love for God and for others. You have a great opportunity to speak and sing your love for God right here in church. You also have a great opportunity today to speak your love for others. They may be in this church this morning, they might be at home or they might be miles and miles away. You can speak to them. If it has been too long since you have given word to your love, break the top of the container and pour it out. You can do it.

You can do it in deed too. You can input that phone number. You can give that gift, you can do that chore, you can say those words, and you can give that hug.

If you are loving others in thought and word and deed, there will be little or no room for sin. You will be giving life when you love. It will carry forward to others who will see the risk you have taken and be encouraged to try it themselves.

The catch in the story I keep coming back to is how over the top Mary's act of love was. Is there a message here for us to consider an act of such intensity or vulnerability? Maybe. It could be that we are to consider the direction of our action and find the extravagance there.

When I was a teen, first connected to God and the church, there was a sign on the wall of the church. I was a large word written in Gold cursive letters, made out of wood. It simple said, "Others". I loved it. The Sunday school superintendant, Gerhardt Casten loved it too. The ladies did not like it. IT wasn't pretty. I think Mr. Casten loved it because like me, he knew what it meant to be the other. I know what it is like to not be a part and then to be loved into the family. That is extravagant love. Many people loved me like I was their own son and I was. That is over the top loving in thought, word and deed. God does lead us to love like that. When we do, it changes everything. I am here because I was loved like that. My parents in the faith live on and will continue to live on.

Judas and sin were not the main character today. While his sin lead to death, Mary's love led to life and it continues to do so. Her action invites us to join her in loving Christ and others in the same way.