

The Cast|People Engaged in the Story of Jesus Christ

The Pundits

John 11.45-12.8

March 11, 2018

Therefore many of the Jews who came to Mary, and saw what He had done, believed in Him. ⁴⁶ But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them the things which Jesus had done. ⁴⁷ Therefore the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council, and were saying, "What are we doing? For this man is performing many signs. ⁴⁸ "If we let Him go on like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." ⁴⁹ But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all, ⁵⁰ nor do you take into account that it is expedient for you that one man die for the people, and that the whole nation not perish." ⁵¹ Now he did not say this on his own initiative, but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation, ⁵² and not for the nation only, but in order that He might also gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. ⁵³ So from that day on they planned together to kill Him. ⁵⁴ Therefore Jesus no longer continued to walk publicly among the Jews, but went away from there to the country near the wilderness, into a city called Ephraim; and there He stayed with the disciples. ⁵⁵ Now the Passover of the Jews was near, and many went up to Jerusalem out of the country before the Passover to purify themselves. ⁵⁶ So they were seeking for Jesus, and were saying to one another as they stood in the temple, "What do you think; that He will not come to the feast at all?" ⁵⁷ Now the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that if anyone knew where He was, he was to report it, so that they might seize Him.

*12.1 Jesus, therefore, six days before the Passover, came to Bethany where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. ² So they made Him a supper there, and Martha was serving; but Lazarus was one of those reclining at the table with Him. ³ Mary then took a pound of very costly perfume of pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped His feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. ⁴ But Judas Iscariot, one of His disciples, who was intending to betray Him, *said, ⁵ "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and given to poor people?" ⁶ Now he said this, not because he was concerned about the poor, but because he was a thief, and as he had the money box, he used to pilfer what was put into it. ⁷ Therefore Jesus said, "Let her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of My burial. ⁸ For you always have the poor with you, but you do not always have Me."*

We've been looking at the many cast-members in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John... the writers use these minor characters to show the Main Character ...Jesus Christ is revealed in relationship with others.

THIS section of John's Gospel is a great divide ... the line is now crossed and Jesus Christ is

now marked for death (v.53)... There's a lot going on here... a number of different cast members... a new sense of urgency and intrigue in the story... And amidst the unfolding plot, some really important things are communicated about the basics of spiritual life ...

John stands between two events and these two moments are JUXTAPOSED... i.e. they're set side-by-side for the purpose of contrast... On the one side is death and decay (the death of Lazarus) and on the other side this expression of life and beauty and love... And John USES this juxtaposition (two things brought together to show a contrast) – John uses contrast to clarify the core issues of the spiritual life. And we always NEED that... to simplify and clarify!

Have you ever met someone three or four times and then on the fifth time...you just can't recall her name and... you really should know it by now...but you just DON'T? And you're just too embarrassed to ask (I mean how many times do we need to over this?!)

Well, it's like this in the spiritual life. We've been introduced to certain words and realities...and the people around us often USE these words and ideas and "by THIS time I ought to know what they mean so I CAN'T ask...but truth is: I'm not really sure."

We can act as if we all understand what they mean when, in reality, we're kind of fuzzy... But with these ideas it's not just a definition of a word that we need... not even a correct definition – we need the reality of the idea, an experiential encounter with what the words represent... Just as to simply KNOW a person's name is not the same as knowing that person...so with these words: to define the word is good...but that's NOT the whole thing.

And the three words that are going to be clarified are faith, love and goodness. When you see their opposites (in contrast), these ideas stand out much more clearly. So, what we'll do is: #1 – See John setting up the whole contrast thing and #2 – See how he uses contrasts to clarify these three BIG IDEAS: a) faith b) love and c) goodness.

Here's the BIG contrast that sets the tone for the whole passage: stench and fragrance. At the end of CH 11, Jesus Christ raises a dead man and that man (Lazarus) was not "sort-of-dead"... HE WAS GOOD AND DEAD!.. Four days dead!

And when the Rabbi tells them to roll away the stone so He can look into the tomb, the cave, into the MOUTH OF DEATH... the dead man's sister says, "NO! ... By this time there will be a stench!"

And now at the beginning of the NEXT chapter we're reading about a fragrance ...Jesus Christ is anointed with perfume and the aroma of this extremely EXPENSIVE oil fills the entire house ...

One section ends with the stench of death and ... on the other side of the watershed is the

fragrance of life: a clearly identifiable contrast! Death and life ... foulness and fragrance...the assaulting smell of decay and the alluring scent of costly perfume...

John apparently recognizes the contrast and it sets the tone for a series of contrasts that clarify some of the biggest ideas in the spiritual life: three contrasts.

Contrast #1 has to do with faith... where the self is rooted or resting, the basis of our confidence: IT'S THE CONTRAST BETWEEN FAITH AND the opposite of faith (Do you know the opposite of faith?)

FAITH and FEAR... John is very interested in faith or belief and believing and, here, he draws our attention to the sharp divide between believing and being enslaved to fear.

The text begins with this contrast: some people SAW this miracle, Lazarus raised, a dead man COMES TO LIFE AND AS A RESULT, they believed in Jesus Christ.

Others saw the same event, saw the man dead, wound up in cloth, his face wrapped in a way that would prevent a living man from breathing...and then he was RAISED... and this second group (saw the same thing the first group saw)... ran to the religious authorities and tattled...were whistle-blowers!

AND WHY were they "rats" and not followers? Because they were afraid... John has been exploring that idea through the whole book... the fear of exclusion keeps people from doing what they want to do... In John's mind what holds people back from believing is not their commitment to science or rationality or to intelligent arguments... it's not a lack of evidence...they are bound by fear... the opposite of faith is NOT science – it's FEAR!

So often when people say, "I just can't believe ...I'm not that kind of person, I base my life on science not on faith... I make my life-commitments on the basis of evidence and seeing... not believing"... So often that's just a cover for fear...

These people had the evidence... but they wouldn't see it to its rational conclusion for fear of rejection ... they're rooted in the acceptance they have from their community (in this case a religious community) ... and they're enslaved by the fear of being excluded... They told themselves they were being patriotic or good, but truth is they were SLAVES.

See, whatever you depend on IS your MASTER... and everyone depends on someone or something... AND they were not depending on God. In fact, they were depending on the status quo and on their positions and their social standing... THEY TRUSTED IN THOSE THINGS ... depended on those things and... that's why they lived in fear.

See, everyone believes in something... the question is, "Can what you believe in BE TAKEN

away from you?"... If it can then you **MUST** live in fear of what ever can take it away. (Judas believed in money as we'll see in a minute ... and he fears when that's threatened).

Second **CONTRAST**: Has to do with our orientation to others and to possessions.... The contrast is Love vs. Greed. Faith depends... faith rests on or roots itself in some **SOURCE**: believing is receiving... but **LOVE, ON THE OTHER HAND, LOVE** is essentially giving ... or at least seeks to express itself by giving... and in the second part of today's text... Mary is loving while Judas is greedy...

Mary's love comes out of awareness... of all the people at that dinner party... **SHE** is the one who's **AWARE**... She's been listening ... she'd been actually receiving the words Jesus Christ had been saying all these months...

She was the believer (had faith in Jesus Christ)... **SHE WAS, BY FAITH**, receiving His promise and His grace and His love, receiving the fullness... and having **BEEN LOVED** by Jesus Christ...she is now overflowing **WITH** love **FOR** Jesus Christ... (1 John 4.9: "We love, because He first loved us.")

She understands that Jesus has come to **LOVE** ... and to **LOVE** is to **GIVE**... He has come, the infinitely valuable **ONE** the precious **OIL** ... came to be **GIVEN** came to be poured out... a lavish act of **PRODIGAL LOVE** from God, the Father,... wasteful in its extravagance... **MARY GETS IT** ... Jesus loves the poor more than anyone who ever lived but something even more important than the poor is going on... the Son of God is taking a last deep breath before plunging into the abyss of the **JUSTICE** we deserve... Mary gets it! She's the **Prodigal Daughter** (like we saw last week!)

She has been loved... and she loves in return and her love enables her to feel with the Beloved... she **SENSES THE URGENCY OF THIS MOMENT** ... that Jesus will not pass this way again ... that **HE WILL BE SPILLED OUT FOR THE SINS OF ALL THE LOST CHILDREN OF GOD** ... and for her sins!!

She is un-self-conscious and that enables her to be focused on the needs of the Loved One... she sees what others don't see (not even the disciples!) ... she took the love of Jesus seriously and it made her forget about money...and she is free to love... creatively and lavishly! (Her self is not rooted in money so she's not afraid to part with it.)

Judas, by contrast, is **NOT** aware of the infinite importance and urgency of the moment ... **HE'S DULL** and religious and full of **HIMSELF** and he's a liar and trying so hard to **LOOK** righteous...

He **DID NOT** take seriously the love that Jesus Christ was giving... he didn't see his own sinfulness and the infinite value of God's gift... He was not receiving love and he cannot give

love... can't give at all ... HE IS NOT SECURE and he has to hold on to all he can get... it's all up to HIM.

3rd CONTRAST: this one has to do with GOD and my relationship to Him... The contrast here is between DIVINE GOODNESS and HUMAN EVIL...and this one's a bit more involved. (Whereas the others are truly opposite ... these only apparently so.)

There is, in this passage, a lot of evil. The clergymen are plotting double-murder and cover-up. Judas is a thief and betrayer...pretending to be a humanitarian! Some of the eyewitnesses are complicit in the murder by snitching and denying the truth... fear is twisting people... power is abused ... BUT ...

In the midst of it all, God honors the priesthood He established and He puts the truth into the mouth of Caiaphas the high priest. GOD TAKES HUMAN EVIL AND GOD BENDS it for His own purposes.

The words of fear and malice from Caiaphas simultaneously express God's goodness and love. Unwittingly Caiaphas... predicts that in the death of Jesus Christ the nation of Israel will in effect die and will, with Him, be raised ...

And the Resurrected Israel (i.e. those who are IN Jesus Christ) will include Jews and Gentiles "not the nation only but gather into one the children of God"...

These clergymen were racists... fear-mongers manipulators and murderers... but still God is revealing through their leader (Caiaphas the High Priest) how the world will be healed (see Eph 2-3!).

Human evil and divine goodness juxtaposed...in the contrast it's all clarified!

And as you think of TRUE SPIRITUALITY ...you have to see this contrast. These fearful religious leaders thought that they could do a little pragmatic evil so they could hold on to a lot of good "If we just kill this one good man we'll preserve what's really important: the Temple and the Nation and the people who respect us and look up to us! We'll save our place!"

So they killed the Good Man but still, in less than a generation... what they feared happened anyway: the Romans destroyed the temple and disbanded their nation... and "all men" were believing in this Good Man...and His movement would outlast even the Roman Empire.

And Caiaphas was telling the whole story. Point is: whenever we think that God is withholding some good thing from us... "and if I just do wrong this once I'll keep this thing I want and HAVE TO HAVE..."

BUT IN THE END we'll find: that thing or person or situation is NOT ours after all... and we'll be only bitter and hardened and dominated by the idol which, at last, will be taken from us ... THIS TEXT screams to us: God will work out His will with or without us and IT WILL be infinitely better than our fearful selves imagine!... SO, GET WITH THE PROGRAM! Divine goodness wins over human evil.

God's Kingdom, His will and His reign, cannot be resisted... but it can be enjoyed and pursued and we can come to celebrate it and participate in it (like Mary did) ... and sometimes it costs us greatly to seek God's way... but eventually we see, in this life or the next: GOD'S WAY was infinitely better... and didn't really cost us at all!

When I see that God took the world's greatest injustice: the one truly good and perfectly loving Man, arrested, mocked, showered in human spit and then separated from the Father He'd loved for all eternity ... AND when I REALIZE that this greatest human evil was also God's greatest display of grace and love... it really helps me make sense of the hurts and difficulties in my life ... the Cross assures me that my pains and the pains and sins of planet earth will not have the final word ... God will turn it all to good.

That's the meaning of the Good News of Jesus Christ: God will overrule. Goodness will have the last word... faith will triumph over fear...love will overcome greed... divine goodness will prevail over human evil... The Cross of Jesus will be the moment of His glory... God will bring life out of death... The stench of death will give way to the costly fragrance of life filling the whole house ...filling the whole world!

In the meantime... be believing not fearful, loving not greedy and joyfully seeking the reign of God in your life.

Receive by FAITH.

Express by LOVE.

Rest in the GOODNESS OF GOD.