

Fifth Sunday in Lent: Choose to be generous

Readings: Isaiah 43: 16-21, Psalm 126, Philippians 3:4b-14

Gospel: John 12: 1-8

Focus

An exciting new event in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island ministry was the September 2009 ordination of the first traditional Aboriginal woman to the priesthood. Yulki Nungumajbar was ordained by Bishop Gregory Thompson in a simple wooden church in a service which lasted 2 hours. It was clear that Yulki was well loved and respected as an elder and as a church leader. It is inspiring to see the faith and endurance of such fine leaders, lovingly and cheerfully carrying out God's work in very challenging situations in remote parts of Australia.

Sentence

Jesus said, "Leave her alone so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."

Reflection

At an extraordinary dinner after Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, Mary does an extraordinary thing. The costly ointment, the wiping of feet with hair, the house filled with fragrant perfume – all these evoke images of extravagant gestures and abundant generosity.

Superficially, this can be seen as a shameful waste and an unseemly demonstration of emotion. At a deeper level, like Lazarus' dinner itself, we are witnessing a matter of life and death. The coming Passover is a passing over from death to life; the anointing of Jesus' feet an acknowledgment that Jesus will die and be buried, then raised to new life.

The energy to deny the matter of life and death in this moment is attributed to Judas who denies Mary's action and its deeper significance. Instead, Judas counts the cost and suggests something more practical could have been done. Jesus' response to Judas is sharp – let Mary be and do, and don't use the poor as an excuse for not doing what needs to be done now.

This is not a denial of our responsibility to respond to poverty with compassion and justice. Rather it is an affirmation of our freedom to choose to respond to unique moments in our lives where we can love with Mary's generous extravagance and abundant generosity in the matters of life and death we encounter.



Yulki Nungumajbar the first traditional Aboriginal woman ordained as a priest.

LENT 5

Affirmation

We believe that God is doing a new thing – a way in the wilderness; rivers in the desert springing forth. As God's people, formed for God, we drink deeply of this generosity and share the life giving water with others.

We believe God invites us to walk in integrity, to trust in the steadfast love of God; to dwell in God's house and sing with thanksgiving; to be wary of those who do harm – who say one thing and do another.

We believe God invites us to be confident in our humanity, in our place as God's people. In spite of the losses we face, we know we have gained Christ Jesus as our hope and our way to fullness of life.

We believe we are called to be Christ-like in his living, dying and rising. As we press on in our journey through life, we hear God's call to us in Christ and seek to follow his way.

We believe we are free to be generous in matters of life and death. Free to love without counting the cost, truly in the moment where love and life are undivided. We rejoice in this calling now and always. Amen.

Intercessions

Leader: Christ Jesus, help us to choose generosity.

Congregation: that we may share your extravagant love.

As we consider the pain and progress of the world, the living and dying of the earth, and the suffering of those who lack water, food, shelter, health care, education and opportunity. **L.C.**

As we consider those we are close to in life and love and those we are separated from by distance or disagreement. **L.C.**

As we consider our daily life and work, our times of rest and recreation. **L.C.**

As we consider the mission of the church and our place in making this visible in our lives. **L.C.**

As we consider those we know to be in particular need at this time and those who support them. **L.C.**

As we consider those we know who live in hope of a better life. **L.C.**

As we consider those who suffer in body, mind or spirit; those who mourn the loss of someone they love; those who are dying and those who have died. **L.C.**

As we consider God's generosity in our own living and dying. **L.C.**

Response/Action

- Watch the ABM DVD 'Priest Lady'.
- Choose to be generous with our time. Find a way to beat the rush of life by giving our attention to one person or one thing we consider to be important at this moment.
- Choose to be generous with our talents. Think outside the square and offer to share one of our gifts with a person or group we think may appreciate it.
- Choose to be generous with our treasure. Consider supporting the livestock distribution project.
- Choose to be generous to ourselves. It may be that we need to receive the generous love of another at this time.

LENT 5 STUDY GROUP QUESTIONS

Jesus said: "Leave her alone so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me." (John 12:7)

1. In what ways does the ABM story remind you of Mary's generosity in the Gospel reading?
2. In what ways does the ABM story remind you of Jesus' response to Judas in the Gospel reading?
3. What are the matters of life and death involved in the work ABM is doing?
4. Can we think of examples in our own community where extravagant generosity is frowned upon as wasteful?
5. What do we make of Jesus' words: 'You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me'? What does it say about our response to poverty? What does it say about our faith in Jesus?
6. Are there ways the life of the church can benefit from the example of Mary's extravagant generosity? What impact could this have on the way the church engages with the wider community?