

Eat and Be Merry

Some years back I was asked to visit a hospital to see a woman (not a church member) who had just had major surgery. She had cancer.

I found her on the fourth floor in her darkened room in Washington Hospital, in Pennsylvania; it was a depressing place. The shades were drawn. People hovered about in attendance. Tubes were hooked to her in a half dozen places; and a nurse was adjusting her IV as *she* was put into a wheel-chair for a trip downstairs for a CAT scan.

Her skin had a yellow pallor to it, the warning sign of liver trouble to anyone who's been around hospitals. And even though I'd been warned of all this...still I was surprised at our brief encounter.

It turned out she didn't have any time to talk, really. She was on her way out of the room, even as I tried to introduce myself. She had two sisters with her, both of them in from out of state to try to help and encourage her. They...were trying not to cry; she...was smiling! Energetic. Upbeat!

Her attitude is what got to me most. It felt like that smile on her face...was coming from deep within: bubbling out, flowing over. She wasn't laughing (this was her third, major surgery in seven months), but even as she held a small, silver pan beneath her head...obviously dreading with quease the trip down the hall and saying to me, 'Forgive me if I have an accident...I'm feeling motion sickness'.... Even in spite of the bumps in the elevator (have you ever thought what even the slight jar of stopping on a floor...and being rolled out those doors would feel like...if your stomach were like a volcano?).... Even through all this she had an indomitable sense of humor.

It was as if there were, - - floating about all of us in this unlikely..miserable scene...except...she seemed FINE, /it was as if she was saying: "Here I am, hooked up to a life line, family with me, completely vulnerable in a gown, being pushed by an orderly, a minister who's a stranger I don't even know...it's all I can do to concentrate on each jar of these turning wheels...and still...still...life is worth it! (*Mmmmm*)

Life – is worth it!

Even when marching into hell for a heavenly cause What a fitting translation of our Bible text!

Because so many people get so uptight about God, and right and wrong, and life and death, that finally....finally for some - life just stops being...fun! (Is your life...fun? Does it...attract you?).

Jesus never intended our lives to be dull and mundane. Empty. To the contrary, in this passage we see the Lord's intention on the subject...the subject of impending doom.

The number of killjoys in the Christian church over the centuries has been amazing: Puritans stripped color and ornaments from churches. There is a Church of Christ denomination in the central part of the US that forbids instruments in its sanctuaries, singing only. Some Baptists still prohibit dancing. One of the largest, younger denominations in the country, Calvary Chapel, will not allow anyone, *anyone* to move...during the sermon.*. (In St. Augustine, FL I passed one of these; it was five floors high and gleaming glass....)

Gruff, old men..*shout* at kids... as a generation going to the dogs; and fearful, young divorcees freeze up in paranoia rather than ever trust again. ..and live, and risk, and enjoy life.

There's a great life to be had (and Christians, we have a major celebration approaching!), but a lot of people, sadly a lot of Christians, have stopped enjoying life. On their terms life is a sad affair. Sometimes a death sentence. They're mostly...waiting to die. And not all of them are sick in body.... My friend at Washington Hospital found a truth. That just because you're facing death, even approaching it, **doesn't mean you have to stop living.** Far from it! That may be all the more reason to enjoy: to revel and exult...in abundant life, and abounding love!

That's our Lord's point here in Matthew. He's telling us a bright and hopeful bit of his Father's promise....that **the Way....God made the world....all is not lost....when death comes!**

Jesus has been talking with his disciples: teaching crowds, wandering the city of Jerusalem as the climax of the Passover approaches. He himself is staying on the outskirts of town, in a friend's home when he again tells his friend of his approaching...PASSION! That is...his reverent...LOVE, his *passion*....to do God's will...even unto death. Even if it means death on a cross!

~ And, as if to underscore it.. Matthew...then turns to repeat the fact by saying that, at that very moment, while – Christ - is speaking, somewhere else – across the hilly city – the rulers of the Jews are plotting Christ's death....the very death of which he spoke.

The Plot to Kill Jesus

26 Now it came to pass, when Jesus had finished all these sayings, that He said to His disciples, 2 “You know that after two days is the Passover, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified.”

3 Then the chief priests, [a]the scribes, and the elders of the people assembled at the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas, 4 and plotted to take Jesus by [b]trickery and kill Him. 5 But they said, “Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar among the people.”

The Anointing at Bethany

6 And when Jesus was in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, 7 a woman came to Him having an alabaster flask of very costly fragrant oil, and she poured it on His head as He sat at the table. 8 But when His disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, “Why this waste? 9 For this fragrant oil might have been sold for much and given to the poor.”

10 But when Jesus was aware of it, He said to them, “Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a good work for Me. 11 For you have the poor with you always, but Me you do not have always. 12 For in pouring this fragrant oil on My body, she did it for My burial. 13 Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her.”

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~ So here’s our diagram of the scripture lesson; it has two parts. Part one...has two...sub parts: 1a. Jesus himself...says that in two days the son of man will be delivered up to crucifixion. 1 b...repeats the same news....only this time a view from outside as the plotters plan their destruction of this “dangerous” man. (Part one...is dark and foreboding. Full of deadly dread...for what’s ahead.)

// Then, **part 2**. Into this setting at Simon’s house in Bethany, comes a woman with a very, *very fine* - expensive flask...of perfume. An alabaster jar of perfumed ointment.

Now she...is the cause for quite a quirk in the *joyous* surprises of history! ☺ If she is the same woman talked about in another part of the gospels (Mark or John), that is...if this is the same incident where the fragrance is worth three hundred denarii...then we have an incredible thing happening here. Because three hundred denarii (when a workman usually got about ONE...for a day’s wages) : would have meant that her perfume poured on Jesus here would have been worth about a whole year’s wages. Incredible. Wasteful! *Scandalous!* As a matter of fact, figuring with the reasoning of the disciple Phillip, when he’s talking about feeding

the multitude of 5,000....this valuable ointment cost as much as would a complete feast for over 7,500 people. No wonder....Jesus' friends were abuzz... at this **outrageous** act! The sheer...audacity of it!!

But what does Jesus do....as his followers and friends get all huffy about this outpouring of love? See Judas, scowling in the corner? No wonder thirty pieces of silver looked good to him – that same evening.

While everyone else is upset....Jesus looks...at the love. He looks in love at this crazy, selfless, reverential act. He takes what could have been an incredibly awkward situation...and showers his grace upon it. "Thank you!"... is **his** benediction upon her.

He says, almost mockingly, "She's come to anoint me for my funeral! And his eyes glisten...with sad humor, tears of joy, powerful love. A conviction that this is good news...for the world. (Belly laugh on my part/a sort of exhale/snort)

Beloved, Jesus knows what's ahead.

- For God's sake...he knows!

But do we see him wringing his hands? Crying? Dreading what's ahead?

No!

He responds with calm. Even forcefully, empoweringly....his answer is a life giving, "Let's get on with living! While I am alive...let's live. Fully! Up to the last minute!"

Friends, the thing is...we live in a temporary beauty. Nothing here will last. This special, sacred sanctuary....will not be here, 400...500 years from now. Who knows...?

Eat. Drink! Be merry. Relax. Chill out. Let your hair down. Enjoy life!

Live – God's blessings..to the fullest....while you can. Celebrate. Dance to the music!

(quickly/concisely!) When Jesus looked 'round upon his small band of followers, he must have said to them, clearly...to their horrified....judgmental faces, to the disgusted feelings pouring out of their pores.... When he saw their reaction to this extravagance...just when He's announced his passion for God....to the ultimate, death on the cross. He must have said something like, "Hey guys.... Relax!

This side of Heaven life's always going to have its problems, the poor, the needy. You'll have heartbreak around you. Help them.

But God has set everything....for a banquet here. *(Motion to Communion Table).*
Come on in.

The door's open. The table is set. Sit down and celebrate! A-a-a-men!