

“Don’t Be Afraid! Your King Has Come!”

Some parts of our Reading may be fairly familiar. For most folks, the story of the Triumphant Entry into Jerusalem by Jesus has familiarity because they have heard or read from accounts of the event as reported by the Synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke each year during Palm Sunday. The account I just read from the Gospel of John is not used in the three year cycle of Lectionary Readings for Palm Sunday, so it is not as well known. There are some significant differences between what is reported in the Synoptic Gospels and in the Gospel of John. **When comparing this Text and the Synoptic Gospels, I argue the Gospel of John is more accurate, especially about the details of the event and its setting.**

This Scripture from the Gospel of John has three parts, which are interrelated. The three portions are:

- **The Anointing of Jesus in Bethany by Mary in verses 1-8.**
- **The Plot against the life of Lazarus in verses 9-11.**
- **The Triumphant Entry of Jesus into Jerusalem in verses 12-19.**

The first part of this Scripture is about Mary, the sister of Lazarus and Martha, and how in Lazarus’ home in Bethany she poured expensive perfume on Jesus’ feet and wiped them with her hair. **The Gospel of Mark 14:3-9 and the Gospel of Matthew 26:6-13 have a similar story but they do not report the woman’s name.** Those two Synoptic Gospels agree with each other in saying the Anointing took place, also, in Bethany but at the home of Simon, who had suffered from a dreaded skin disease. The Gospel of Luke does not report the incident, even though Luke had a copy of Mark and frequently wrote in his gospel what was written in the Gospel of Mark.

The Gospels of John and Mark agree that if the expensive perfume was sold to help the poor, then it would bring **“300 silver coins”**. Matthew merely reported the perfume would bring **“a large amount”**. Since Matthew most likely had a copy of Mark, it is not clear why he did not choose to also report the same specific value of the perfume. **John’s use of the same number of coins as in Mark indicates the high probability that it was the amount originally mentioned during the Anointing of Jesus.** It also strongly suggests John’s source of information is as good as Mark’s.

Again, the Gospels of Matthew and Mark do not supply a name for the woman, who poured the perfume on Jesus’ feet. Certainly, Mark’s source of information about the event would have known the name of the woman, so why did he leave it out of his report? Additionally, Matthew and Mark never mention the sisters, Mary and Martha. However, the Gospel of Luke did include information about Mary and Martha, although he never referred to their brother, Lazarus. Also, Luke’s only report of the name “Lazarus”, was given when Jesus told the Lazarus parable. Matthew and Mark never mention the name “Lazarus”.

Now, the **Gospel of Luke 7:36-50** reported a different story about a woman wetting Jesus’ feet with her tears and drying them with her hair, and then, pouring perfume on them. Luke’s story is not found in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark. However, Luke says this situation took place in the home of a Simon, who the gospel author identified as a Pharisee, instead of in the home of the man, who had suffered a dreaded skin disease. **I suspect Luke knew Mark had confused two different situations in his gospel – the woman wetting, drying, and perfuming Jesus’ feet in Simon’s house and the Anointing of Jesus’ feet by Mary in her brother Lazarus’ home.** In addition to wanting to report the first incident correctly, as he did, I further suspect Luke did not report Mary’s Anointing of Jesus’ feet because Luke did not want to mention Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, nor of their connection with the Lazarus, who was raised from the dead by Jesus.

Why would the Synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke and/or their sources not want to report about Mary, Martha, and Lazarus? My hypothesis is, they knew about the resurrection of Lazarus but did not report it because of the possible negative implications. Such a report would provide details about how Lazarus came back to life after being dead for a longer period time than Jesus had been before his resurrection. **One of the concerns, in addition to Lazarus coming back to life after being dead for a longer amount of time than Jesus had to do with the fact that after Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension he was no longer walking among them, while Lazarus was still alive and was continuing to be seen by many of Jesus’ followers. Such facts would have easily been seen as Scandalous because they would provide good arguments for someone saying Lazarus was greater or more important than Jesus!**

If that is correct, then, they would not have reported the raising of Lazarus, nor could they report the plot to murder him. **However, the author of the Gospel of John went on to share in verses 9-10, “A large number of people heard that Jesus was in Bethany, so they went there, not only because of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, whom Jesus had raised from death. So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus too, because on his account many Jews were rejecting them and believing in Jesus.”**

The Gospel of John continued to connect what happened to Jesus in his relationship with Lazarus by stating this relationship was the reason a multitude of people welcomed Jesus during his entry into Jerusalem. The Scripture states in **verses 17-18, “The people who had been with Jesus when he called Lazarus out of the grave and raised him from death had reported what had happened. That was why the crowd met him — because they heard that he had performed this miracle.”** Since the Gospels of Mark and Matthew could not mention Lazarus’ role as the reason for the crowd, they did not say why the great throng of people welcomed Jesus. However, **Luke 19:37 gave a hint of acknowledgment as it reported, “When he came near Jerusalem, at the place where the road went down the Mount of Olives, the large crowd of his disciples began to thank God and praise Him in loud voices for all the great things that they had seen.”** I suspect Luke was especially referring to the raising of Lazarus among “the great things that they had seen” but he did not want to specify that because of the potential negative implications.

Those, who are most familiar with the accounts of the Synoptic Gospels when celebrating Palm Sunday, may have noticed John did not report Jesus Cleansing the Temple on the same day as his Triumphant Entrance into Jerusalem. The Gospel of Mark stated Jesus looked around the Temple on that day, and then, left the city. It was not until the next day when Mark said Jesus Cleansed the Temple. However, the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, both report it was during that one entrance into Jerusalem – the Triumphant Entrance on Palm Sunday when Jesus Cleansed the Temple. Mark knew the Temple Cleansing did not happen during the Sunday at the beginning of Jesus’ last week of life and ministry. Matthew and Luke knew the Temple Cleansing happened on the same day as Jesus’ entrance into Jerusalem. **John’s account agreed with Mark’s declaration the Cleansing did not happen on that last Sunday – on Palm Sunday and John’s version affirmed Jesus Cleansed the Temple on the same day he entered Jerusalem – only it was near the beginning of his public ministry, instead of at the end of it.** The author of the Gospel of John, alone, claimed to be an eyewitness among the New Testament gospel authors. **All of those facts support my contention the Gospel of John was more accurate than the Synoptic Gospels on these matters.**

Only the Gospel of Matthew joins the Gospel of John in connecting the Triumphant Entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem with **Zechariah 9:9**. The Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of John used Zechariah 9:9 to remind us Jesus came as the promised Humble Suffering Servant King. He did not come to Jerusalem as the Warrior King, which was desired by the public, so Jesus did not pander to the people’s desires. Nevertheless, the Gospel of John reported the Pharisees recognized their schemes to discredit Jesus in front of the people were not working. John states in **verse 19, “The Pharisees then said to one another, ‘You see, we are not succeeding at all! Look, the whole world is following him!’”** As a result, the Jewish Religious Authorities decided to move ahead with their plot to kill Jesus.

Instead of giving into the temptation to try to control of the world, the Gospel of John reminds us Jesus came to fulfill God’s Purposes and not the people’s desire to be victors over others. Unfortunately, self-professed Christians have often sought to put Christianity in control of the world through military power. On a more personal basis, individuals are frequently tempted to seek to have God or Jesus or their Faith give them the upper hand over other people – merely to benefit themselves.

So, since Jesus did not give into the temptation to respond to oppression with violence, we are also called to, like Jesus, put our trust in God’s Self-Giving and Sacrificial “Agape” Love. Let us praise God for this Truth and follow the example of Jesus Christ, to boldly live the New Life of “agape” love and to have faith in God’s “Agape” Love, as was demonstrated through God’s Own Son, Jesus Christ! We do not need to get caught up in the violence of trying to conquer others – to be the oppressors of other people. **We don’t have to be controlled by fear for our King has come and shown us the trustworthiness of God’s “Agape” Love, along with the better way of seeking God’s Ultimate Purpose of reconciliation, unity, forgiveness, wholeness, healing, and love! Amen.**