

still waters

home church studies

Psalm 31.9-16

[Worship]

9 Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am in distress; my eye wastes away from grief, my soul and body also. 10 For my life is spent with sorrow, and my years with sighing; my strength fails because of my misery, and my bones waste away. 11 I am the scorn of all my adversaries, a horror to my neighbors, an object of dread to my acquaintances; those who see me in the street flee from me. 12 I have passed out of mind like one who is dead; I have become like a broken vessel. 13 For I hear the whispering of many—terror all around!—as they scheme together against me, as they plot to take my life. 14 But I trust in you, O LORD; I say, "You are my God." 15 My times are in your hand; deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors. 16 Let your face shine upon your servant; save me in your steadfast love.

Consider:

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In the middle of Philippians, Paul gives us a hymn that encapsulates Jesus' entire life. Jesus, Paul tells his readers, was always equal to the Father. Still, he emptied himself and became a slave, the suffering servant of Isaiah. He not only humbled himself in becoming incarnate, but also "was obedient, even to the point of death, death on a cross!" In that death and resurrection, he is exalted, and he shall be victorious. After that sweeping overview, the gospel reading hones in on the harrowing story of the passion.

Perhaps the saddest piece of the passion is the endless betrayal. These were Jesus' friends. They had eaten meals with him, learned

with him; they had probably gone swimming and hiking together. They had prayed together. They had seen his miracles and his healings. And they all denied him.

In this long dramatic gospel passage, it's easy to overlook the feast at Bethany and skip straight to Passover, with its pulsing movement toward Calvary. But, in a story filled with the treachery of Jesus' followers, the anonymous perfuming woman knows who Christ is. Her perfume, Jesus tells us, presages his death: "She has anointed my body in anticipation of my burial." That perfume names Jesus the messiah as "Anointed One" and crowns him king.

Feminist scholars have pointed out how many women in scripture go without names. The argument is that the authors of biblical texts did not name the women because the women were not deemed important, and perhaps that is true. But I'm sometimes relieved that so many characters in the Bible are nameless, for it helps me read myself into their place. I spend most of my time behaving like Simon the Leper's priggish and horrified guests: I am threatened by those who have the temerity to name God the King of Kings, Lord Messiah; I am critical of those who treat that King of Kings with the extravagance he deserves. On Passion Sunday I will try to take my cues instead from the nameless woman.



[Scripture]

Philippians 2. 5-11

5 Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, 7 but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, 8 he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. 9 Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Also read, Mark 14.1—15 .11