

Fifth Sunday in Lent 13 Mar 2016

Isaiah 43: 16-21

Psalm 126

Philippians 3:3-14

John 12:1-8

Today, we'll start with the Gospel, as you may have already spotted the mistake; a simple slip that nevertheless draws our attention.

The "gospel according to Luke" is in fact the "Gospel according to John" and that's quite easily recognised as John writes in the style of Quentin Tarantino; an American filmmaker and actor whose films are characterized by non-linear storylines, satirical subject matter..... and features of neo-noir film.[see Wikipedia]

The scene in today's gospel narrative is really quite unusual, especially when we look at it as a piece of 'film'.

Read it again so we all have a clear picture of the story in our minds.

And rather than go straight into an elaboration of the story; let's now look at the subtleties that 'Tarantino' has incorporated into this picture.

The timing of the action is given as "*Six days before the Passover*"; and that would make this the Sabbath before the death of Jesus, the final day of rest perhaps!

The actual story is almost a piece of black comedy; for we've probably all been to a wake before and shared a meal or hospitality with the family and friends of the deceased; but here we have a scene of the funeral wake, with the deceased actually present.

Are we being drawn into the very reality of resurrection, is this an invitation to leave behind what we know, and what we see and enter 'as through the looking glass' another whole world of possibility.

The cast in the picture we are already familiar with, and in order of appearance we have; Jesus, Lazarus, Martha, Mary and Judas Iscariot; and it is perhaps significant that Lazarus like Jesus is actually named twice; suggesting both a link, and also, once again, illustrating that this is a resurrection narrative.

What is also worth noting is that in previous versions of this film, from the directors Matthew, Mark and Luke, the identity of the woman who anointed Jesus feet is not

given; only in this versions of the film do we have "Mary" as the one doing the anointing.

Now both Matthew and Mark were 'G Rated' films and so they had the woman anointing his head and not his feet; and that gives us another clue to 'Tarantino's' intent with this film; it gives us an echo, and a preparation for the events of Maundy Thursday.

Watching this film in today's partially liberated culture, we obviously would miss the bizarre nature of the actual activity that is depicted in the movie.

First Mary, a woman, would have uncovered and let down her hair in a room full of men. Then she anointed his feet, rather than his head, again bizarre.

Next she touches his feet, and then wipes them with her hair, this is really unusual behaviour; and the sort of thing we would only see, or expect to see, in a work by Tarantino.

And the result of this bizarre behaviour is that "*The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.*" It feels like we are being taken to another view of living, one that is beyond the normal and one that fills the house with perfume; we are left with a sense of and scene of extravagance.

And just as we glimpse this new reality, we have the interjection of Judas, we are brought back to our normalised reality, and we are taken from the extravagant scene and call the whole show into question.

It is as if Judas speaks from our viewpoint, for how many times have we asked the same criticising question?

5 "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?"

The voice of Judas is our voice, and I'm sure we can all recall ourselves asking the same question he asks; why doesn't the Vatican sell its treasures and give to the poor, why doesn't the government give more aid, why don't the rich give more to the poor?

It is the voice of reason, what Judas asks is logical and a righteous criticism, it is a voice we all relate to, for it is the voice that is 'normal' and reasonable.

The voice of Judas is the voice of the 1% of the planet that holds more wealth than 50% of the rest of the planet; it is our voice.

Now, we'll come back to the text in brackets, but first just consider the response that 'Tarantino' gives as lines for Jesus to speak;
"7 Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial."

Here we are again taken away from the normal into the absurd, for how can "She" "keep it for the day of my burial." when she has just poured it out onto my feet?

We have been brought back 'through the looking glass' into that other whole world of possibility; and we are brought there so we can receive the whole enlightenment of the film: "You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."

And only after we have seen the subtlety of the film can we truly get the impact of what Jesus is saying; for the 'Tarantino' style of writing now opens us to follow this enlightened algebra of Jesus..

If "You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me"; then you could add, however; if you always had me, then you would not have the poor.

And we can now look back to the bracketed text and see how this has been inserted to fill out the algebra...

Judas, in verse 4 is qualified with the brackets; "(the one who was about to betray him)"; remembering that Judas is our normal voice, what this film is showing us is how we betray Jesus, for living in our rationalised world of 1% wealth, we betray the enlightenment of Christ and we ensure that we will *always have the poor with you*.

Again, now in verse 6, Judas is qualified with the brackets; (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.)

Not only do we betray the enlightenment of Christ , but we are depicted here as thieves, and sobering as it is, when we realise that we, the wealthy 1% have more wealth than half the world's population, then perhaps we are the ones that steal from the common....

Right at the beginning we saw that Lazarus, like Jesus is given a double mention; and so rather than being in the place of Judas, Tarantino is seeking to drive our attention toward resurrection.

This short film is an invitation to step through the looking glass into another worldview, into the extravagance of Mary, to see that life lived in giving of ourselves, life lived

intimately touching Christ is the way both to eliminate the poor and to fill the world *with the fragrance of the perfume.*"