

Betrayal
(Part 1)
Read Mark 14:1-11

Though it was midday, priests lighted two of the sconces on a wall. A closed door and shutters fastened at the windows made the room dark, as well as cooler on this steamy Palestinian day, and, most importantly, free of eavesdroppers. Voices, despite inner anger, were suppressed to little higher than a whisper.

“He must be killed. And quickly,” said one whose beard was not spattered with gray like the others.

These younger ones don’t think first. “Passover is too close, too many crowds are swarming the city to seize him now,” said the chief of the priests. He paced around the room filled with bobbing shadows, amongst assenting heads and grunts. “There may even be a riot.”

“That won’t make the Romans happy,” said another priest.

“So, we concur,” said the chief priest, while moving toward the door. “We wait till the Passover crowd goes home.” They walked out and behind them closed the door to a room that stored only secrets.

Merely hours later, they would reverse their decision about when they would kill him.

In a home just over a mount from the priests’ meeting, Jesus was reclining on padded mats with pillows around a circular rug used for dining. He was a guest of Simon, known as “the leper.” An uninvited visitor snuck her way forward to Jesus’ side, like a doe in a wood filled with bobcats. She uncovered an exquisite container of high-priced perfume, and let the contents flow onto His head. Without consideration for her own privation, she poured out the equivalent of a year’s salary. Her exhibition of devotion was followed by indignant reproofs at the wastefulness of her act. Outcries for the plight of the poor were hurled. Jesus put a halt to the mistreatment: “She will be remembered,” He turned toward her, “wherever and whenever the gospel is proclaimed.” She would not comprehend until later that she had been preparing His body for burial.

Nearby, Judas resolved to put into effect his scheme. Jesus’ talk of His impending death—the fourth such prophecy in weeks—and the loss of the money, which would have come from the sale of the perfume, signified the termination of Judas’ aspirations. These aspirations, which included sitting next to a Messiah in his kingdom, immeasurable wealth, and recognition he lusted for but scarcely received, even from the throngs which followed Jesus, were now as irretrievable as the drained perfume. Thus, he left Jesus, strode through the streets and into the priests’ room of secrets to betray him, without misgivings.

As the priests listened to Judas’ conspiracy, they were initially incredulous. The chief priest hesitated. “We’ll need to know when and where,” he said. *This man truly wants to sell out his own teacher.*

Judas, self assured, strutted over to the chief priest, perceiving from the old man’s rigid stature that he had his entire attention. “First, I need a guarantee of silver.” Then he said, “I’ll have to do it before the Passover feast is over, before he leaves for Galilee again.” About five minutes later, he walked out with their pledge, making plans for the most advantageous time to double-cross one who had been his friend.

So, the initial plot of the priests required revision; Jesus' arrest would have to take place during Passover.

Three had made plans for the death of Jesus: priests, a woman, a friend. Mark develops a narrative, with these three ingredients, structured like a sandwich: preparation for death by priests/preparation for death by a woman/preparation for death by priests, with the aid of a betrayer (Mark 14:1-11). This sandwich technique serves two purposes. With the woman's tale in the central position (like ham and cheese, or peanut butter and jelly, within a sandwich), her service to Jesus is accentuated.

Second, on either side of the woman's story (like two slices of bread), the priests, as well as Judas in the later section, work as contrasting elements to her selflessness. Her memory is assured, "wherever the gospel is proclaimed," because others attempted to profit, whereas she endeavored to provide.