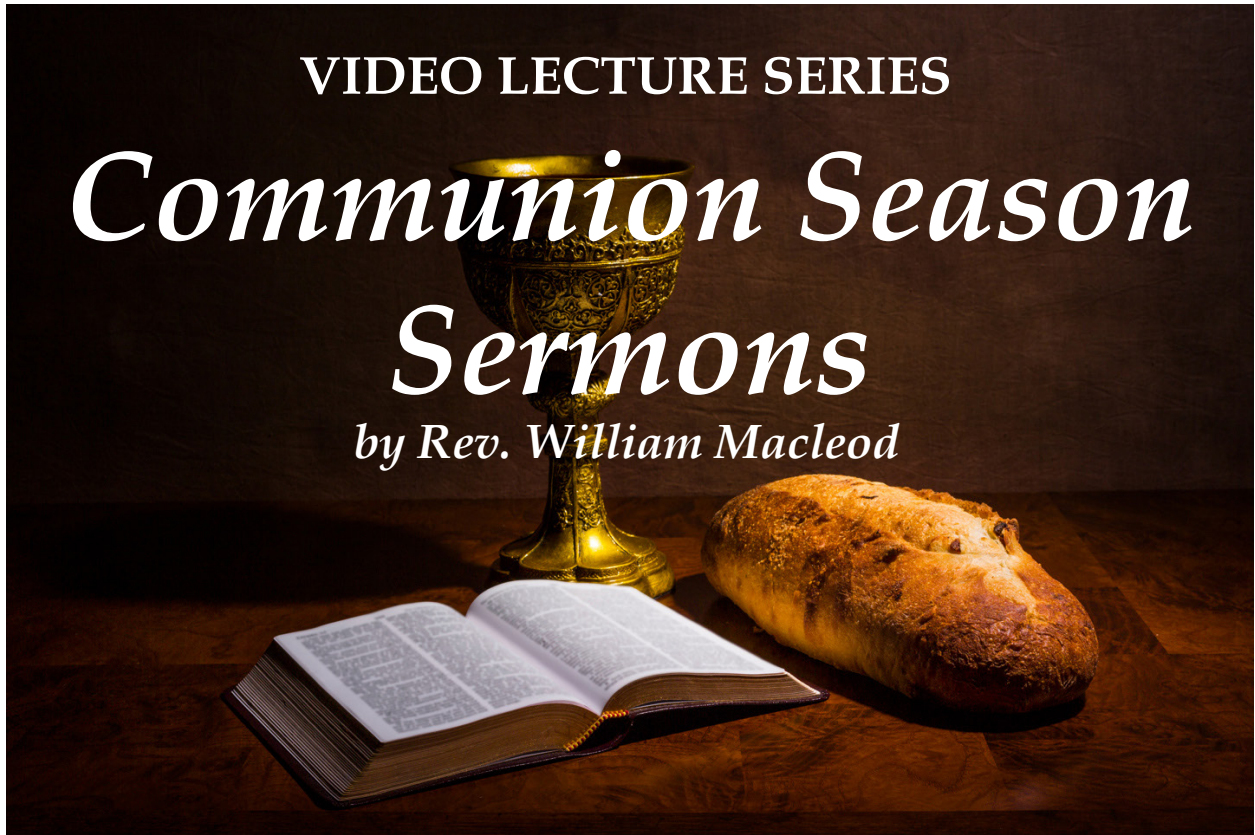


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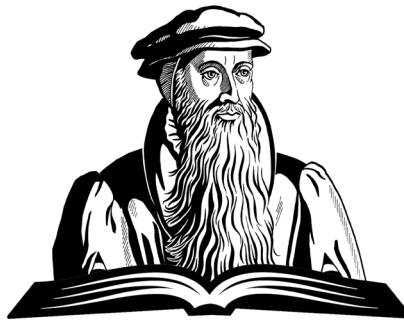
Communion Season *Sermons*

by Rev. William Macleod



Sermon #4

Mary's Great Love *Mark 14:3*



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Rev. William Macleod recently retired, after serving as minister of the gospel for 45 years at Knightswood Free Church of Scotland (Continuing), in Glasgow, Scotland. In addition, he was for many years the editor of the denominational magazine, *The Free Church Witness*. He was also Professor of Systematic Theology and Principal of the Free Church (Continuing) Seminary, in Inverness, Scotland. He is married and has three adult children and six grandchildren.

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Communion Season Sermons

*An Introduction and 7 Sermons
by Rev. William Macleod*

Introduction (Luke 22:14–20)

Sermon #1: Pardon My Sins (Psalm 51:9–10)

Sermon #2: Prepare Me for Thy Presence (Psalm 24:3–4)

Sermon #3: Examine Yourself (1 Corinthians 11:28)

Sermon #4: Mary's Great Love (Mark 14:3)

Sermon #5: The Awful Cup (Luke 22:42) / Communion Address

Sermon #6: Salvation for Pharisees and Prodigals
(Luke 15:29–30)

Sermon #7: Christ is Coming Again (Revelation 22:20–21)

Communion Season Sermons

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Sermon #4

Mary's Great Love (Mark 14:3)

Today I would like to speak to you from Mark's Gospel, chapter 14, and verse 3. We'll read some verses, from the beginning of the chapter:

“After two days was the feast of the passover, and of unleavened bread: and the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might take him by craft, and put him to death. But they said, not on the feast day, lest there be an uproar of the people. And being in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at meat, there came a woman having an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious; and she brake the box, and poured it on his head. And there were some that had indignation within themselves, and said, Why was this waste of the ointment made? For it might have been sold for more than three hundred pence, and have been given to the poor. And they murmured against her. And Jesus said, Let her alone; why trouble ye her? she hath wrought a good work on me. For ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good: but me ye have not always. She hath done what she could: she is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying. Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her.” Amen.

So, thinking particularly from verse 3 and onward: “And being in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at meat, there came a woman having an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious; and she brake the box, and poured it on his head.” It's Communion time, and so I would like to speak to you today about something which happened just two days before the very first Communion. It's recorded for us in three of the Gospels. And in fact, as we notice, in verse 9, Jesus says, “Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her.” Here we are, thousands of miles away from Bethany, and 2,000 years after this woman had anointed Jesus, and we're still remembering what she did. It was so beautiful, something so lovely in itself, so God-glorifying, and such a challenge to us too.

So we have here, first of all, *A Woman with a Great Love for Christ*. John tells us, in his Gospel, chapter 12, that it was Mary, who anointed Jesus—Mary, the sister of Martha, and they had a brother, Lazarus. In chapter 11 in John's Gospel, we're told how that Lazarus was sick and then died. And how Jesus came along four days after, and called Lazarus out of the grave and raised him from the dead. Mary, Martha, and Lazarus were disciples of Jesus. They loved Jesus, and Jesus loved them. They lived in Bethany, a little town two miles to the east of Jerusalem, on the far side of the Mount of Olives. And Jesus often stayed there. It was a house where he felt very welcome.

And here he is then in Bethany, but today he's not in the house of Mary and Martha, but he's in the house of Simon the leper. Now, lepers generally lived in colonies by themselves. The lepers

would live outside of Jerusalem. Wherever they went they said, “Unclean! Unclean!” People kept away from them. So obviously, Simon here has been healed of his leprosy. And no doubt, the meal that he is providing at this time was a meal of thanksgiving, and expressing his appreciation to Christ for having healed him of his leprosy. Jesus healed many people of different diseases, and many indeed of leprosy.

Mary loves Jesus, and she wants to show her love to him. So how is she to do it? You can imagine her thinking to herself, “What can I do for Jesus? How can I show my love to him?” Do you love Jesus? And do you ever think, “What can I do for Jesus? How can I show my love for him?” And there’s many ways, of course, in which we can show our love to Christ. And one way is by coming to the Lord’s Table and remembering his death till he comes. “As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord’s death till he come” (1 Corinthians 11:26). Mary thinks, “Well, I want to get a gift for Jesus, a really special gift.” So she goes to Jerusalem, to the marketplace there, and she buys perfume, very expensive perfume. We’re told here that it would cost more than three hundred pence. Now a pence here is a Roman coin, a denarius, a small silver coin. It was what a laborer would earn for working for one day. So more than three hundred pence would be the equivalent of a laborer’s wages for a year. So in modern terms, that would be thousands of pounds. So perhaps this was her life savings. We’re told that it was spikenard. Spikenard came from the region of the Himalayas, in northern India, Nepal. And it would have to be carried all the way across Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Syria, down to Israel. So no wonder it was expensive.

And she didn’t just give to Jesus a spray of the perfume, or a splash of the perfume. We’re told that she broke the box and poured it on his head. The whole jar was poured over him. It was lavish. You can imagine how the whole room was filled with the perfume, the scent, the beautiful smell of it all. She wasn’t grudging in any way, but she gave everything, as it were, to Christ. Do you love the Lord Jesus? And do you show your love? We’re told that even to give a cup of cold water to someone in the name of Christ is noted in heaven, and brings a reward with it. We have to show our love to him. We should really love Christ, and show it more and more as the days go by. And one way we show our love, of course, is at his Table.

The second thing that I want you to notice is that she was *A Woman with Great Understanding*. Jesus explains her action in verse 8: “She hath done what she could: she is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying.” That’s amazing. She had anointed Jesus for his burial. No one else seemed to be thinking about the burial of Jesus. Peter and John were, no doubt, great theologians, but they don’t seem to have any idea of Christ dying and being buried. Mary, it would seem, is the greatest theologian of them all. In Luke chapter 10, verses 38 to 42, we’re told of Jesus visiting the house of Mary, and Martha, and Lazarus. Before Jesus came, obviously great preparations were being made. They were preparing a meal for Jesus, for his twelve disciples; maybe for other people too. So there’s lots of work to be done in preparing. And Mary was busy, and Martha was busy. And then Jesus comes, and he sits in the house, and he starts teaching. He’s speaking, and Mary can’t carry on working. She stops. She sits at his feet. She’s listening, and she’s learning. And Martha comes along and complains, and says to Jesus, “Do you not see that my sister is not helping me. Tell her to help me. I need help. There’s so much to be done.” And Jesus says to Martha, “Martha, Martha, Mary has desired the one thing needful, and it shall be given her. Martha, Martha, you are cumbered about with many things: One thing is needful: and Mary has chosen that good part, which shall not be taken from her.” So Jesus was pleased. He was delighted with Mary sitting there listening to him.

And she wasn't just listening. It wasn't going in one ear and out another. She was listening, she was taking it in, and she was understanding it, and she was believing it. She believed, when Jesus told them how he was going to be betrayed, handed over to the Romans, and crucified, and that he would be buried, and after three days he would rise again. And she knew she would have no time to anoint him with a view to his burial, and so she comes to anoint him now. She shows wonderful insight, taught by Christ. We think of Lydia, in Act chapter 16. We're told that God opened the heart of Lydia, so that she gave heed to the things that were spoken by Paul. God opened her heart, she understood, and she was saved. She was converted. We think of Priscilla and Aquila. Priscilla, Aquila's wife, obviously had a great grasp of the truth because we're told that when Apollos came along with defective knowledge—he had only heard about the baptism of John and the teaching of John—Aquila and Priscilla took him aside and taught him the way of God more perfectly. Priscilla is mentioned because she was able fully to explain the gospel to Apollos, and she herself perhaps had a deeper and fuller understanding of the truth than her husband, Aquila. In the Old Testament, we have several like that. We think of Deborah, the prophetess, and how she led Israel, and how Barak wouldn't go to fight against the Canaanites without Deborah being there to help him. We think of Manoah's wife—Manoah, the father of Samson—and how Manoah's wife seemed to be much more spiritual and perceptive than her husband. We're told also about Huldah, the prophetess. In Jesus Christ, there is neither male nor female, neither bond nor free, neither Jew nor Gentile. There is that essential oneness, although different roles are given to men and women within the church and within the family; and men are given a leadership role within the church and family. But here's this woman then, Mary, she has great understanding; her eyes have been opened to the truth, and she anoints Jesus with a view to his burial. Has the Lord opened your mind, and given to you understanding of the gospel?

Thirdly, we see here *A Woman who was Horribly Criticized*, verse 4: "And there were some that had indignation within themselves, and said, Why was this waste of the ointment made?" What a waste! More than three hundred pence just gone like that, the scent, the perfume all poured out and lost. This money could have been kept and used to feed the poor. No doubt there were many poor people in Jerusalem. There would be hungry people, there would be beggars, who had very little in the way of clothes. And it seems that Judas Iscariot was particularly involved in criticizing her. We're told that in John 12. John tells us it wasn't because he had any great love for the poor, but because he was a thief, and he carried the bag, the purse for Jesus and the disciples. When he got what was put in the purse, he would take some of it for himself, and he was thinking of what he could have got here. And we notice in verses 10 and 11 of this chapter that immediately after this event, "Judas Iscariot...went unto the chief priests to betray him...And when they heard it, they were glad, and promised to give him money. And he sought how he might conveniently betray him." The love of money had ahold of Judas.

So they're complaining about this woman because of this waste of money, this extravagant gift that she has given to Jesus. What would you do for Jesus? Christians can sometimes be terribly critical of others, when they see others who love the Lord more than them. They can be jealous and critical. But it's very wrong of us if we are jealous of those who are more godly than ourselves. We think of Cain and Abel, who Abel's sacrifice was accepted by God, and Cain's was rejected. And he was so angry that he murdered his brother—the sin of jealousy. So here, a woman who did a lovely deed, but she's horribly criticized by the disciples, and particularly, Judas.

Finally, we have here *A Woman that Jesus Loves*. Jesus is delighted with what she does. He liked the smell of the perfume. He was truly human. He had an appreciation for beautiful things,

and for lovely smells, and no doubt, delightful food, and all these things, good things in themselves, he enjoyed. But it's particularly, because he could see her heart, and he could see, in her deed, the love she had for him and the devotion she had for him. And therefore, he's delighted. He notices her theological perception, how she was anointing him with a view to his burial. But he also says, "The poor you have with you always"—verse 7—"and whensoever ye will, ye may do them good: but me ye have not always." She had done what she could. We're not asked to do any more, really. She had done what she could. She did everything she could. "She has come aforehand to anoint my body for the burial."

"The poor you have with you always." When my parents were young, more than a hundred years ago, the people on the Island of Lewis where they lived were very poor. Sometimes they were short of food. They lived in black houses made of stone and turf; very primitive; clay floors. But today, people seem so much wealthier, and yet we find people today in our society complaining that they must choose between heating and eating. So in that sense, yes, the poor are there always. We see beggars in the street begging for money. How often, it's drink and drugs that bring them into that situation, because there's universal credit, social security, and so on, for people. But no doubt, there are genuine cases too. But in other countries, we see very poor people. And it's our duty to help the poor, to do what we can to help them. But what we have here is love—love for Jesus. And Jesus sees the loving heart. He sees her faith in him; her appreciation for him. She knows that she's a sinner. She knows that she deserves hell, and she knows that Jesus died for our sins, and she's rejoicing in the Savior—the Savior who's on his way to Calvary to suffer on her behalf. She has forgiveness through Jesus Christ. And appreciating his atoning work as the Lamb of God, she comes and she anoints him.

Jesus says to us, "*This do in remembrance of me...*As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come" (1 Corinthians 11:24 and 26). What great love Christ has to us, and how we should love Christ in return. We love him because he first loved us. We come to his Table loving him and wishing to show our love to him, and our devotion to him. And as we sit there at his Table, partaking of the bread and the wine, we think of that body that was broken, and the blood that was shed—his sufferings on our behalf, and our salvation that we now enjoy, and we look forward to the day when Christ will come again. Our hearts have been touched by Christ. Mary's heart was touched. Has your heart been touched? Do you love Christ? If you do, then, you are to come to his Table joyfully, remembering his death, and rejoicing in the sacrifice that he made for you. Today, we have eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. We love him. We love him, because he first loved us. We love him with all our heart, and we want to show our love to him.

Let's pray.

O Lord our God, we thank thee for thy love towards us. And we thank thee that from all eternity, thou didst love us and choose us to be thine own. We thank thee, Lord Jesus Christ, that thou hast come from heaven's glory into this cursed world, and thou didst take all our sins upon thyself, and thou didst suffer and die in our room and place. We thank thee, Lord Jesus, for dying for us, and we pray that we would live for thee, that we would give ourselves, give our best to thee, and give our bodies a living sacrifice to God, to do thy will continually, which is our reasonable service. Bless us then, O Lord, each one. Be with us in all our ways. Help us to remember thy death till thou come, and forgive us for all that is wrong in our lives, for Jesus' sake, Amen.