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The Lesser Become Greater

Mark 14:1-11

Mother Teresa will always be remembered for her solicitous and tender care for the destitute dying in the streets of Calcutta. She said she loved them because she saw the face of Christ in each. Who are the leaders you look to as models?

GROUP DISCUSSION. On pieces of paper, quickly write the names of the first five important leaders that come to mind. Read the lists aloud. What do you notice about your lists?

PERSONAL REFLECTION. Jesus' death and resurrection are at the heart of Christianity. But sometimes the language we use to talk about this is so theological, so scripted by the hymns we sing and the sermons we've heard, that we lose the impact and the meaning. Imagine what it would be like to have heard Jesus predict his death. What sort of feelings might you have had? What actions, if any, might you have taken?

Jesus tried to prepare his disciples for his ignoble arrest and painful death, but his disciples didn't want to hear about it (see, for example,

Mark 8:31-33). To the disciples, death as a criminal was a clear indication of the defeat of everything they had hoped for in a new promised realm of peace. Yet Mary, the mother of Jesus, predicted that the leaders, the rich and powerful, would reject Jesus (Luke 1:46-55). And in this passage, a woman, in a culture that denied her access to education, political and public power, performs a sacrificial act of love in which she recognizes and values Jesus' impending death. *Read Mark 14:1-11.*

1. The author tells us that it was the time of the Passover (v. 1). What is the significance of this (see Exodus 12:21-28; 1 Corinthians 5:7)?

2. What do we know about the woman from this passage?

3. It was the Jewish custom not to anoint a criminal for burial. Given this, why were this woman's actions especially significant?

4. Matthew 26:8 tells us that it is the disciples who are speaking in verses 4-5. What does their response to the woman (vv. 4-5) reveal about them?

5. Why do you suppose they didn't understand the significance of the anointing?

6. The disciples' comment about the poor could indicate a kingdom concern for the poor. Did the disciples really have an understanding of the kingdom's relationship to the poor and weak (see Mark 9:33-35; 10:13-15, 23-26)? Explain your response.

7. Why did Jesus disagree with the disciples?

Which of his words have the greatest impact for you, and why?

8. What would be the importance of remembering this act "wherever the gospel is preached"?

9. How is this act remembered in your church (for example, during Communion or Holy Week)?

10. What do you think motivated Judas to respond as he did (vv. 10-11; see also John 12:6)?

11. Why is it that we remember Judas better than this woman?

12. What connection can you make between remembering this act of anointing and our appreciation of the nature of the kingdom?

Think about Jesus' words, "She has done what she could." What is it that we could do so that we might hear the same words from Jesus for ourselves? Use your answers to spend time in prayer.

Now or Later

The Civil Rights movement is a good historical example where suffering love was practiced in overcoming evil. Watch the movie *Amazing Grace*, based on the life of Martin Luther King Jr., as a follow-up to this study.