

35. Holy Monday: Oil



The Anointing of Christ, Julia Stankova, 2021

Multi-layered meaning oozes through the pages of the Bible when it comes to oil. It is laced with notions of kingship, priesthood and Messiahship, carries hopes of healing and presages death. Just days before his death, Jesus is eating with friends when one of them, Mary, takes some costly oil and lavishes it upon Jesus' feet before drying them with her hair (Jn 12.1-8). This is more than hospitality. It is an anointing "for the day of my burial," as Jesus instinctively realises (v7). Mary's love and fear for Jesus pour out with her oil. Her act of human extravagance mirrors the story of divine extravagance she sees in Jesus, the one who will shortly pour himself out in death.

Not everyone is impressed. While Mary abandons herself utterly to the feet which nails will soon brutalise, three onlookers in Julia Stankova's painting keep themselves semi-hidden, intact, hearts closed to the beauty of this outpouring. Perhaps one of them is Judas with his mealy-mouthed complaint about wastefulness (vs4-6). Both passage and painting reveal not only what self-surrendering love looks like but also what the absence of such love looks like.

So where are we? On the floor or behind the door? Does our love for Jesus risk letting its hair down or choose to remain safe and tight-lipped?

Today...

...may we give ourselves fully
to our love for you, Lord Jesus.

Amen