

Welcome to this act of worship, shared with sisters and brothers across the Circuit.

Gathering Prayer

Giving God, no money can buy your love, no words can say how deep my thanks to you are, no actions can fully show my gratitude.

But as I read scripture and hymns, as I pray, as I listen to your Word, I offer you my best, and celebrate your presence with me – now and each moment of every day. **Amen.**

Song StF 78 Give thanks with a grateful heart

Give thanks with a grateful heart
Give thanks to the Holy One
Give thanks
because He's given Jesus Christ His Son

And now let the weak say I am strong,
Let the poor say I am rich,
Because of what the Lord has done for us.
And now let the weak say I am strong,
Let the poor say I am rich,
Because of what the Lord has done for us.
Give Thanks.

Prayers

Spend a few moments now giving thanks to God for the blessings in your life.....

Today we especially say thank you for our sense of smell and the things we can enjoy through it: freshly baked bread, herbs & spices, the salty tang of the sea, freshly cut grass, autumn bonfires and the scent of fresh Spring flowers.

For the gift of Jesus; for his living and teaching; for his healing and example; for his dying and rising, generous God, I give you thanks and praise.

For all that you have done for me; for all that you are for me; for all that you will be for me – generous God, I give you thanks and praise. Amen.

Now come to God in repentance, seeking forgiveness for past wrongs, deliberate or otherwise, trusting that God hears our prayers and trusting that he does indeed give us fresh new start.....

Please change my heart Jesus, so that the fragrance of my life will always be sweet to you. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Pause to ponder the many ways we can say 'thank you' to someone.....

Our Lenten journey is approaching its conclusion in Jerusalem, so let us stop a while with Jesus in Bethany, at the home of his friends Martha, Mary and Lazarus. Martha and Mary showed their love and thanks to Jesus for raising their brother Lazarus from the dead.

Martha cooked a very special dinner for Jesus and his friends.

Mary anointed Jesus' feet with very expensive perfume.

Reading John 12: 1-8

Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, 'Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the

money given to the poor?' (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.) Jesus said, 'Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.'

Reflection

Gathering for a dinner with friends sounds to me like a recipe for a great time! It was something that Jesus often did with friends and strangers; he was often criticised for eating with the 'wrong kind' of dinner guest.

The writer of John's gospel gives quite a bit of detail about what happened at this particular dinner. Martha showed her love, devotion and gratitude to Jesus, for raising Lazarus from the tomb, by providing wonderful food for him and his friends. It was what she was good at and we can imagine the tantalising smells coming from Martha's kitchen.....

So here is Jesus, sheltering with his closest, trusted friends for a short while before entering Jerusalem, where the net of the Jewish authorities was gradually closing around him.

It's an intimate scene, bursting with the sweet scent of friendship, fellowship, love, thankfulness, shelter and, of course, food.

And into that atmosphere, at Mary's hand, breaks the fragrance of nard....or 'spikenard' to give it its full name. The fragrance of the nard envelopes Mary's action of anointing Jesus feet and wiping them with her hair, and in doing so, lifts the scene to a whole new level.

Perhaps the perfume was in Mary's possession for the anointing of her dead brother Lazarus. But now, in a place of intimacy amongst friends and family, Mary's overwhelming gratitude for what Jesus had done in returning her brother to life, spills out into this act of extravagant devotion.

Those present would have been shocked. For a woman to uncover and let down her hair in public was utterly shameful, but Mary is not in a place of shame as her devotion and gratitude to Jesus overflows....and Jesus recognises her actions and accepts them, bringing dignity to both donor and recipient.

In that moment and place, Mary did what she could, whether planned or spontaneous, to show her thankfulness and devotion to Jesus, and none who were present could have missed the fragrant result. It was a prophetic act as Jesus' own death approached, Mary's love demonstrated in the humble service of wiping Jesus' feet with her hair. It would not be long before Jesus washed his disciples' feet, showing them how, in humility, they were to love and serve each other.

Our love, thankfulness and service to each other, to those in our local and global communities, and to God, are demonstrated in all the things we do every day with and for each other, how we treat other people, especially those who are different from us, how and when we spend time with God. Our lives are entwined and we need each other to live life to the full.

Martha and Mary served Jesus in very different ways, and Jesus accepted both of their offerings. Sometimes others might perceive our actions, trying to faithfully follow Jesus' example every day, as beautiful acts of worship, or an extravagant waste of time, resources and effort, but Jesus, never rejects what we offer to him in true, heartfelt gratitude and service.

Judas was not on the same wavelength at all!

We can sense Judas' frustration at events and a much less fragrant odour is released into the room as he criticises Mary for what he sees as wasteful extravagance. Judas really struggles with Jesus' acceptance of Mary's act of devotion. Why does Jesus not use his obvious power, both supernatural and as a crowd puller,

to achieve great things for God's people, use it to do good? Above all, why doesn't he free them from the oppression that was Rome?

Perhaps Jesus' refusal to use his power in the way that Judas wanted, is what caused Judas to seek out the very authorities who were trying to kill Jesus. Yet Jesus will not bend to the temptation to use force over others, even for good. Jesus resisted it the desert and is not about to give way to it now. He has chosen the way of servanthood, the way of invitation, the way of rejection, the way of love.

Perhaps the gathering in Bethany gave Jesus courage and resolve to face the journey to Jerusalem; Mary's anointing affirming him in the way he willingly chose to go....to suffering & death, the lingering smell on his clothes reminding him of her devotion and love, prompting Jesus to give thanks too.

Smells are a strong trigger for memory and I can imagine that even after a long time, the fragrance of nard would trigger the memories of what happened in the house at Bethany, for all who were there. Maybe different aromas triggered other memories leading up to Jesus' Passion, death and resurrection, The smell of the crowd and cut palm leaves, the aroma of lamb at the Last Supper, the fire in the High Priest's courtyard, the burial spices the women carried to the tomb, fish cooking on a beach fire. I like to think that they all helped Jesus' disciples begin to make sense of everything that happened in Jerusalem and beyond.

So what do you smell like? Not literally of course! But can others smell the fragrance of Christ, amongst us?

Apostle Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 2:14-16

'But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads in every place the fragrance that comes from knowing him. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing.'

As we offer our whole lives to Jesus in gratitude, love and devotion, Mary's and Martha's encounter with Jesus reminds us of Jesus' acceptance of us, just as we are, with all our differences.

May our lives be so enveloped, refreshed and renewed by the fragrance of Jesus' love, that it rubs off onto others and they might say to us....'Friend, where is that smell coming from?!' I pray that we would have the words to answer. Amen

Hymn StF 175 Light of the world, you stepped down into darkness

A hymn which expresses through worship, humble gratitude for all that God has done for us in Jesus

1. Light of the world

You stepped down into darkness
Opened my eyes, let me see
Beauty that made this heart adore You
Hope of a life spent with You

2. King of all days

Oh, so highly exalted
Glorious in heaven above
Humbly You came to the earth You
created
All for love's sake became poor

Chorus

Here I am to worship
Here I am to bow down
Here I am to say that You're my God
You're altogether lovely
Altogether worthy
Altogether wonderful to me

Well, I'll never know how much it cost
To see my sin upon that cross (repeat x4)

Prayers of Intercession

Creator God, we pray now for those for whom life is not pervaded by sweet fragrance.....

The poor and hungry, surrounded by the stench of disease, deprivation and debt, of polluted water and unhealthy housing, of failed crops and fields laid waste.

May your hand reach out to bless them, and the fragrance of your love pervade their lives.

We pray for those who live with the acrid smell of war, their lives blighted by conflict, the smell of injury and death, of gunfire and high explosives, of smouldering buildings, dust and debris.

May your hand reach out to bless them, and the fragrance of your love pervade their lives.

We pray for those in hospital waiting or recovering from surgery or other treatment, reminded of their situation by the smell of disinfectant, medicine or anaesthetic

May your hand reach out to bless them, and the fragrance of your love pervade their lives.

We think of those who have lost their sense of smell, no longer able to savour everyday scents once taken for granted – the bouquet of flowers, the aroma of good food, the fresh smell of the sea, perfume which brings back fond memories.

May your hand reach out to bless them, and the fragrance of your love pervade their lives.

Finally, Lord, I commit the week ahead to you. I ask that you travel with me in my work, my leisure, my joys and sorrows. Help me to find the space to breathe in the blessing of your fragrance and offer myself and all I have to you, for you to make whole, strong and beautiful.

May your hand reach out to bless me and the fragrance of your love pervade my life. Amen.

Hymn StF 566 Take my life and let it be consecrated Lord, to thee.

1 Take my life and let it be
consecrated, Lord, to thee.

Take my moments and my days;
let them flow in endless praise,
let them flow in endless praise.

2 Take my hands and let them move
at the impulse of thy love.

Take my feet and let them be
swift and beautiful for thee,
swift and beautiful for thee.

3 Take my voice and let me sing
always, only, for my King.

Take my lips and let them be
filled with messages from thee,
filled with messages from thee.

4 Take my silver and my gold;
not a mite would I withhold.

Take my intellect and use
every power as thou shalt choose,
every power as thou shalt choose.

5 Take my will and make it thine;
it shall be no longer mine.

Take my heart it is thine own;
it shall be thy royal throne,
it shall be thy royal throne.

6 Take my love; my Lord, I pour
at thy feet its treasure store.

Take myself, and I will be
ever, only, all for thee,
ever, only, all for thee.

Blessing

Amazing God, I am so thankful for the gift of being alive! May my thankfulness to you pour out in my actions, in my choices, in my dealings with other people, in all that I do.

And may the blessing of God, Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer, be with me always. **Amen**

(Prayers of Intercession taken from 'Uncommon Worship' © Nick Fawcett 2004, published by Kevin Mayhew)

