

Lent Liturgy Soul Mates, Nourished by companionship

Give us this day our daily bread to cement our friendship...

O Lord our God, on this Lenten journey, be our friend, let us be friends and let us be be-friended, we pray.
Amen.

Prayer

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

But as we sing, as we pray, as we listen to your Word, we offer you our best,
and celebrate your presence with us – now and each moment of every day. **Amen.**

Hymn 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.

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...

Prayer of praise & thanks

For homes and food; for families and friends; for all that we often take for granted –
generous God: I give you thanks and praise

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, the scent of
fresh Spring flowers.

generous God: I give you thanks and praise.

For your loving presence in our lives; for strength and guidance; comfort and peace –

generous God: I give you thanks and praise.

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 us; for all that you are for us; for all that you will be for us –

generous God: I give you thanks and praise. Amen.

Prayer of confession Dear Lord Jesus, I am sorry when I don't give you my best;
when I am critical of others and what they do.

Please forgive me; change my heart so that the fragrance of my life will always be sweet to you. Amen.

Lord's Prayer

The language of thanks

There are many different ways in which we can express thanks. Of course, we can say 'thank you', or we can do something to show our gratitude: give a gift, help with a task, organise a nice surprise, send a card, make a donation of money,

The gospel reading today includes a story about how 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 Jesus is anointed at Bethany

Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. ² Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honour. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. ³ Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. ⁴ But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, ⁵ "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages." ⁶ He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.

⁷ "Leave her alone," Jesus replied. "It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. ⁸ You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me."

Reflection

Gathering for a dinner with friends sounds to me like a recipe for a great time!! 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. The writer of John's gospel gives quite a bit of detail about what happened at this particular dinner; Martha shows her love, devotion and gratitude for raising Lazarus from the tomb by providing wonderful food for Jesus and his friends. It was what she was good at and we can imagine the tantalising smells coming from Martha's kitchen. It's an intimate scene, bursting with the good smells of friendship, fellowship, love, thankfulness, shelter and of course, food. And onto that scene, 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 and then, in a place of intimacy amongst friends & 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. Mary did what she could, whether planned or spontaneous, to show her thankfulness and devotion to Jesus in that place, at that time and none who were present could have missed the fragrant result. It was a prophetic act as Jesus' own death approached, her 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 they were to love and serve each other

Our love, thankfulness and service to each other, to those in our local and global community and to God, are made up of 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 & Mary serve Jesus in very different ways, and Jesus accepts both of their offerings. Sometimes others might perceive our actions, trying to faithfully live out 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 is 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, to do good....above all, to free them from the oppression that was Rome?

Jesus refuses to use his power in the way that Judas wants. Jesus will not bend to the temptation to use force over others, even for good. He 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 and 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 the fragrance of nard would trigger the memories of what happened in the house at Bethany, for all who were there. Perhaps different aromas triggered other memories leading up to Jesus' Passion, death and resurrection: the smell of the crowd and palm leaves cut, 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..... all helping Jesus disciples begin to make sense of everything that happened.

So what do you smell like? Not literally of course! Can others smell the fragrance of Christ, amongst us? Apostle Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 2: 14-16, 'But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him. For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing.'

As we offer our whole lives to Jesus in gratitude, love and devotion, may we 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

Song StF 175 Light of the world, you stepped down into darkness Tim Hughes

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

Light of the world, You stepped down into
darkness

Opened my eyes, let me see

Beauty that made this heart adore You

Hope of my life spent with You

And 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

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

And 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

I'll never know how much it cost
To see my sin upon that cross.

Prayers of Intercession *based on a prayer by Nick Fawcett*

This prayer prompts you to hold before God those in need of every kind and asks for the fragrance of God's love to pervade their lives:

Creator God, we pray

for the poor and hungry, surrounded by the scent of disease, deprivation and debt...

For those who live with the scent of war and conflict...

For those enduring the scent of illness and medical intervention...

For those who have lost their sense of smell and cannot enjoy the aromas of food, flowers, the sea or the rest of the natural environment...

For those who smell and taste the scent of grief and loss...

Lord, I commit the week ahead to you. I ask that you travel with me.

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

Blessing & sending

Amazing God, we are so thankful for the gift of being alive!

May our thankfulness to you pour out in our actions, in our choices, in our dealings with other people, in all that we do.

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