

**Holy Excess changes our World**  
**March 21, 2010**  
**John 12:1-8**  
**Bonnie A. Perry**

Where are we in scripture?  
What's going on?  
Two chapters ago—  
Jesus was late  
getting to his friend Lazarus' house.  
Lazarus dies.  
His sisters, Mary and Martha,  
meet Jesus and say,  
"What took you so darn long?  
If you had been here  
our brother Lazarus  
would not have died."

Jesus then in front of a huge crowd—  
walks to Lazarus' grave.  
Rolls the stone from the tomb—  
and calls for Lazarus to come out.  
Three days he's been dead—  
the overly sweet smell of decay  
fills the air.

The people crowd in—  
a first century version  
of watching a car crash—  
they are unable to look away.  
And lo- bandaged, staggering,  
unsure of  
what is up, down or all around,  
Lazarus comes out.  
Jesus says, "Unbind him."

The people are in awe  
—this one they saw  
with their own eyes—  
up from the grave he arose.  
Lazarus' sisters are in shock.  
Lazarus is still trying  
to sort out  
what it means  
to be alive, dead and now alive again.  
And more to the point

the political types  
are wildly aware  
of Jesus' increasing power and currency.

The more the people are enchanted with Jesus  
—the more the people see him  
as the anointed one—  
the messiah—  
the one who might throw off  
the yoke of Roman control and oppression,  
the more likely  
the Romans will be threatened  
and take away what  
little control, power and prestige  
the priests and Pharisees  
have managed to acquire.  
The principalities and powers are rigid.  
The people are tense.  
There is little grace in the air  
—fear abounds.

Caiaphas—  
the high priest channels their anxiety.  
“No—don't you get it”  
he says to his colleagues,  
“If we can locate  
all of the people's unrest  
in this one person—  
and then maneuver it so  
this one person is killed  
the Romans will be satisfied.  
There will be no mass retaliation,  
our people and our temple and our power  
will remain—unscathed, unharmed.”

“We must work to make it so.  
It is better for one man to die  
than have the whole nation destroyed.”

So our passage from today begins.  
Jesus is not spending much time in public.  
He has quietly  
come back to Bethany  
to have a bit of a celebration.  
Lazarus being dead—  
and now not so much.

Seems reason enough to have a good meal.

In the course of the dinner,  
 Mary of Bethany (Lazarus' sister)  
 takes out all that she owns.  
 The best of what she has.  
 She pulls out this amazing perfume—  
 worth a small fortune.  
 Uncorks it and begins to wash Jesus' feet.

The smell of pistachios,  
 rich buttery nuts fills the house.  
 All activity stops.  
 Each one around the table  
 catches their breath.  
 She is doing  
 what the people have longed for.  
 Mary is doing  
 what the Pharisees have feared.

She is anointing Jesus right there.  
 Using what she has—  
 the gifts she has been blessed with  
 to say to Jesus and the world around him.  
 HE IS THE ONE—  
 FOR WHOM WE HAVE BEEN WAITING.  
 THE TIME IS NOW  
 FOR THE WORLD TO CHANGE.  
 THIS IS  
 THE END OF THE WORLD  
 AS WE KNOW IT.

She anoints him  
 as if he is king and royalty—  
 the messiah—the anointed one.  
 With tender love and a caress—  
 here's a woman  
 marking Jesus  
 as God's own forever  
 —much as we do at baptism.

Here's a woman  
 with the guts, the courage,  
 the vulnerability  
 to use the riches she has  
 to say aloud

how much he means  
—when no one else is doing it.  
She is not cowed  
by the religious leaders or the Romans  
—she anoints him.

A public political act,  
that sends him  
on his way to Jerusalem.

Mary does not spare her wealth—  
she uses her riches  
to enshrine his leadership.

She does  
what the Roman authorities are afraid will happen.  
Against social customs,  
norms and mores—  
she marks him as the anointed one.

And that dear friends  
is what we are called to do—  
over and over again.  
We have gifts,  
we have talents,  
we have perfume  
to slather and nard to spare.  
We are called to use  
what we have  
to mark the holy in our midst,  
to act against  
the powers and principalities of this world  
that tell us  
to remain silent,  
quiet and off to the side.  
But we—like Mary of Bethany—  
are called to anoint each other.  
To call each other forth to action.

If this is sounding  
more like metaphor to you than a plan  
—may I offer to you  
one moment of contemporary anointing.

A moment that needs  
to multiply

over and over again across this country.  
 One act—but everything  
 needs to begin somewhere  
 at some initial point in time.

This past Tuesday,  
 our co-warden,  
 Ken Jones,  
 went to a health care reform rally  
 in Melissa Been's district.  
 A swing district  
 if there ever was one.  
 He went with his convictions  
 and I'd say with his version of perfumed oil.  
 With a bow-tie and sign that read,  
 "Entrepreneurs for Health Care reform."

Ken stood up for all of us  
 who long for reform.  
 Ken stood up—the very image of respectability—  
 saying to all—  
 do not hoard—we need more.  
 He stood there—  
 photographed over and over again—  
 a witness—an outward visible sign  
 of God's grace in this world.  
 Calling everyone to something more.

Anointing Melissa Bean  
 and all the rest of us  
 to seek out something more for everyone.  
 It is an act upon which we can build.  
 So this day---  
 where do we use our gifts  
 our riches,  
 our bow-ties and signs,  
 to call for a change—  
 for some sacrifices  
 so that we can move past  
 the world as it is—  
 to the world as it could be.  
 What places of anointing is God calling us to today?

In God's Holy Name—Amen.