

Mary at Jesus's feet is one of the best loved scenes of painters of all ages.
Mary kneeling, touching the holy feet with her hands,
hairdo undone, dark curls spread on the ground
drops of tears
scent of oil
holy kisses.
Mary at Jesus's feet, weeping and wiping
A beautiful picture, indeed.
But concretely?

For all its poetry, this scene has puzzled me for a long time.
I understand that at the time, anointing somebody was a mark of respect
“You have anointed my head with oil” reads Psalm 23
The question is why would Mary be, not only crying on Jesus's feet,
but also wiping the feet with her hair?
It has always seemed to me a little disturbing, a little gross, a bit erotic.
In any case, this act of submission is not your feminist dream.

Well, it took me a while to
step back from the picture, the paintings,
bring the scene back to real life
And realize that
she was probably wiping the feet with her hair
as we
wipe our nose onto someone's sweater when we cry.
Have you ever cried into somebody's arms?
It's not meant to be, of course,
you don't wipe your nose on their sweaters on purpose.
But the nose just happen to rub there,
in the tiny space between “you and me”.
Wiping your tears on somebody,
That's just the kind of thing you do with people
you feel perfectly safe around.
People who love you.
Maybe it's your partner,
your sister, your brother
or your best friend, your mother.
It's people who aren't afraid of your sorrow
of your anger, of your doubts.
People who do not fear your fear
People you are yourself with.
That's what Mary had with Jesus.

I like it that John does not make of his Mary
- as the three other writers of the Gospel do -
a sinner, a woman with “seven demons”, a prostitute.
Oh maybe she was, but in John's eyes, in John's words,
at this moment, she's just a girl, a young girl
beautiful, pure and innocent
In awe and adoration.

Sunday, March 13
Lent 5
John 12:1-8
The Rev. Fanny Belanger

As for me, I like to think of Mary as the little sister.
Sixteen, seventeen years old.
The little sister
of this strange recurring brotherhood of Lazarus, Martha and Mary.
Martha, the can do woman,
responsible, reliable and always busy banging pots in the kitchen
(You know, the one from the parable “Martha and Mary”)
Lazarus is the older brother who is in charge of the family
after the parents passed away
and that's why his own passing away was so terrible.
Without Jesus's intervention, the girls would have been left on their own devices like the two orphans
they already are

Mary is the little sister.
Mary wakes up at night to watch the stars
Mary talks to the birds and she writes poems
Mary forgets the kettle on the stove.
She is the mystic – maybe
but I also think she is the little dreamer.
And of course, she is a little in love with Jesus.
I mean: why would not she?

So Mary -
as everybody is having this big time conversation around the table
as Lazarus recounts his unbelievable spiritual experience, passing from this world to another,
as the big sister is making a fuss serving dishes
Mary, the unnoticed, uncounted for, clumsy dreamy baby sister
acts out
falls at Jesus's feet
and pours her heart as a holy perfume at his feet.

It could be an anecdote
It could be this kind of story that are all together precious and delightful
and a little silly
Like when you pass your phone around between relatives and friends
to show the cuteness around
Pictures of pets, of grand children, making faces, sending kisses.
And yet, yet this anecdote,
“You remember when the little sister fell at the prophet's feet?”
Yet this anecdote the Gospel chooses to tell with it a whole different story
A story so important
That all of them, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John will tell it.
Because Jesus himself promises that *Mary's gesture will be remembered throughout all ages*
(Matthew 26-13)

This gesture of adoration,
of “not knowing what to do to show you how much you care”.
Although she probably does not know Jesus is about to die,
Mary knows that something very bad is going on for Jesus
and she wants to honor him
to offer a tender gesture, a gesture of respect,
and then she's overwhelmed with grief and she cannot stop crying.

Jesus.

What did he think about it?

Was he troubled, embarrassed to be adored that way?

Although at some point in John's Gospel, Jesus starts claiming that

the Father and he are one

He never asked to be worshiped.

And I can't imagine him the chaste, the prayerful, the man of God not being a bit unsettled

by this PDA of some sort,

unleash of raw feminine emotions.

And yet, he lets her do.

And even more: in a few days, he will himself wash his disciples' feet.

Because Jesus saw in Mary's naive gesture that she has understood everything, everything that all the big time conversation guys have no clue about.

Mary has understood that

Love is not about

morality

social justice

a program to do good,

Love is not even about feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, giving money to the poor.

Love is not about doing something for the poor

Love is about being the poor

Love is about being each other's poor.

Love is about vulnerability.

This vulnerability that draws you to share in somebody's pain

This vulnerability that leads you to show people how much you care for them.

Well, I think this is this vulnerability that drives Judas crazy, enrages him against the woman.

In other accounts of the story, the disciples are shocked too.

They want to stop Mary, they make fun of her, they criticize her waste of money

Not even realizing what the so called waste of money would be then "wasted" on their beloved master.

A few days ago, I watched the movie "A Girl Like Her"

A movie that was realized to raise awareness in high schools on students bullying each other.

And you know there is this beautiful, smart and wealthy girl Avery who cannot stop picking on another girl, Jessica, a loving, good-tempered, and nice to everybody young lady.

Avery cannot stop humiliating Jessica, making fun of her, criticizing everything she does.

At some point Jessica starts crying because she cannot take the sarcasms anymore

And she says to a friend: "I don't know why Avery hates me so much"

Well, the best friend replies something very smart,

He says: "Maybe she does not hate you,

maybe she hates herself"

Maybe Avery hates you just because

Under the armor of the popular powerful girl

she is a girl like you

a genuine human being, plain and vulnerable, this human being you dare to be in front of all.

This human being she cannot stand to be, cannot stand to show to the world, for fear of being crushed.

I think Judas is like this Avery girl,
he is a bully because he hates himself.
Oh – he loves who he would like to be, pretend to be.
The man who is in charge of the group, or at least of its money.
The man who does the right thing, thinks the right thing, never need to be corrected.
Judas is a guy who would never wipe his nose into somebody's sweater.
Actually, he cannot stand this display of love,
genuineness and vulnerability.
Judas cannot stand who he is – a human being in need to love and being loved in return -
and so he hates people who can be like that.
Yes, the story could be an anecdote
but it tells us so much today about our society, a society where we have running for president,
somebody who seems to hate people with vulnerabilities.

Yet, we need to look at ourselves too.
How often is it that,
even in our faith, we want to be
the one in charge, the one who does what needs to be done,
the one who knows how?
Of course, we are all who we are
We don't need to be an emotional teenager,
if we are the willful or the strong one.
But we need all to be aware of our own vulnerability.
Our need to be loved
Our need to confess our fears
Our need to give ourselves away
with trust and abandon.
Yes, we all try to pray, to say and do the right things,
to do our small part in social action.
But when was the last time we just took time to love God?
How often do we say to the people we love that we actually love them?
We know these things matter but we always forget
and often it's when the person is dead that we think
“Oh I should have shown him or her how much I cared”.
In a few days, Jesus is going to be handed over,
Mary shows us that it's only love that counts.

After the terrorist attacks in Paris in November,
the French newspaper *Le Monde* made a tribute to the victims
recounting details of people's lives.
And I remember they talked about a young woman who died in the attacks
and her close ones said about her this beautiful thing:
“She knew how to tell people she loved them”
She sent cards, gave present, texted a few nice words everyday to her friends.
She made them feel valuable, worthy
She knew how to make them feel special
She was a little sister Mary.
Oh, we are not all called to send Hallmark cards or text smileys, but we can find our own way
to have a life that says to God and to the world: I love you, you matter to me,
you're worth a thousand denarii. Amen.