

A moment of extravagance

John 12.1-8

In an act of great passion, Mary anoints Jesus' feet with perfumed oil. While Judas criticises it as a lavish waste of money that could have been spent on the poor, Jesus defends it as a prophetic sign of his imminent burial.

This week's resources explore: ways of expressing devotion to Christ; a balance between worship and social action.

 Look out for ways to connect faith with everyday life.

 Download a Planning Sheet to help prepare your session.

Lent 5

Lectionary Bible readings

RCL Lent 5 Year C

Isaiah 43.16-21

Psalm 126

Philippians 3.4b-14

John 12.1-8

Bible notes

- On a day marked by some as Passion Sunday, Mary's passionate act of anointing Jesus' feet during a quiet meal with friends encourages us to consider the sacrifice of Jesus in this reflective Lenten period.
- The extravagance of the moment is felt throughout the whole passage. The perfumed oil that Mary used would have cost around a year's wages and the intensity of the fragrance filled the house (v.3). Her prophetic act is amplified in Paul's words, 'I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord' (Philippians 3.8).
- Judas' role is interesting. Was he predestined to play the role of antagonist, or did he have a choice? What were his motives for betraying Jesus, and when did Jesus first know about this? We can't answer these questions definitively, but Judas reminds us of our own sin and Jesus' acceptance of us, despite it.
- Similarly, the meaning of John 12.8 is unclear. Based on what we already know about Jesus, we can be sure he is not asking us to ignore the poor, but is bringing to the fore the need to balance social justice in a broken world, with adoration of a holy God. Jesus does not seek this adoration himself, but sets himself apart at this juncture to be the recipient of the worship due to God. How do we glorify God and grow in our devotion? And how do we balance that with the needs of others?

Prayers Welsh translations.

A gathering prayer

Circulate cotton cloths with drops of lavender oil on one, and frankincense on the other for people to smell, and water and bread to touch.

Scented oil reminds us of Mary, kneeling at Jesus' feet – preparing him for his journey to the cross. Frankincense reminds us of the magi, who knew even at his birth, that Jesus was God's rescue plan. Water reminds us of baptism, Jesus' baptism and ours, cleansing and quenching our thirst. Bread reminds us that we are invited to a meal – a celebration of Jesus' life. We are on a journey with Jesus, preparing, remembering, getting ready. It is good to be here, to be on this journey together; a journey towards the cross and beyond it, into Jesus' new life.
Amen.

A prayer for forgiveness

When we prefer to look after ourselves rather than other people,
Lord, forgive us and help us.
When we look away from the problems that we see other people struggling with,
Lord, forgive us and help us.
When we give up on something hard, because it is easier than trying to understand it,
Lord, forgive us and help us. Amen.

A prayer for others

We remember the poor.
Lord, have mercy.
We remember the hungry.
Lord, have mercy.
We remember the homeless.
Lord, have mercy.
And Lord, have mercy on us too.
Amen.

A sending out prayer

Help us to see you;
help us to hear you;
help us to know you
as our Lord and God. **Amen.**

Gather

Choose a quiet or active way to begin your session.

Smell the scent

Pass round a small pot of scented oil, e.g. lavender or other essential oil for the children to smell. (Note: essential oils are very strong so don't let the children touch them.) In today's story, Mary uses oil with a beautiful perfume to do something very special for Jesus.

Balancing act

Use a sturdy coat hanger and attach a plastic cup at each end with string. Ask a volunteer to hold the coat hanger. Give each child a handful of sweets, e.g. Skittles™. They take turns throwing sweets into the cups but must ensure the cups remain equally balanced. Today's story is about keeping a balance between worshipping God and helping other people.

Open the Word

Present the reading Open the Bible at John 12.1-8

Judas is angry when Mary pours expensive perfume on Jesus' feet to show how much she values him.

Choose from these two ways of telling the story.

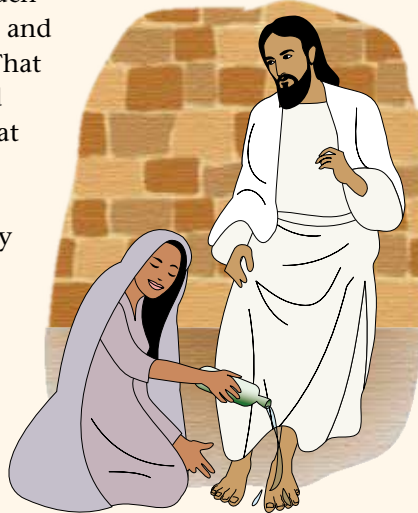
Share the gift Show the children a wrapped birthday gift, saying it contains sweets/ chocolates. Explain that it belongs to you but you don't want to wait until your birthday – you want to open it and share the contents with them now. Do so, and enjoy eating the sweets/chocolates together while you read the story. Mary has a precious gift that she wants to give Jesus, and he appreciates it greatly.

Scented story Gather the children to sit in a circle. Display a clay pot with a copy of the story on a scroll rolled up inside it. Invite a confident reader to unroll the scroll and read it out. When they reach 'the whole house was filled with the sweet smell of the perfume', light a scented candle and place it in the centre of the circle.

The night before he arrived in Jerusalem, Jesus stopped at Bethany. Lazarus, whom he had recently raised from the dead, and his sisters Mary and Martha lived here. To welcome Jesus, they held a special dinner. Lazarus and other guests were sitting at the table, eating with Jesus. Martha was busy serving food and drinks to everyone. Suddenly, in came Mary with a jar of very expensive sweet-smelling oil. To everyone's astonishment, she took the oil and poured it gently over Jesus' feet. Then she let her hair down and wiped Jesus' feet with it. The whole house was filled with the sweet smell of the perfume.

Judas, one of Jesus' disciples who would later turn against him, was at the table and saw what happened. He said angrily to Mary, 'Why did you do that with such expensive oil? Why did you not sell it and give the money to the poor instead? That oil was worth a year's wages! It should have been sold.' (Now it may seem that Judas cared about the poor, but it was the money he really cared about. He was a thief. He kept the group's money purse and would often steal from it.)

Jesus did not agree with Judas. 'Leave her alone,' he replied. 'Mary bought this oil for me, for the day of my burial. She was right to use it. The poor will always be here with you, but I will not.'



Talk together

- How do you think Mary felt before, during, and after Judas' argument?
- If you had a valuable gift to give away, would you give all of it to one person, or small amounts to lots of people?
- How are worshipping God and helping other people connected?

For very young children

Play and explore Mary wiping Jesus' feet.

Play materials: play food and a tea-set.

Storytelling

Pass round a story bag and invite the children to dip their hands in and choose an object (in italics) to help you tell the story.

Jesus arrived in Bethany and went to visit Lazarus and his sisters, Mary and Martha. (*people figures*)

Lazarus sat down for dinner with Jesus and their guests, and Martha served the food she had prepared specially for Jesus.

(*play food*)

Then Mary brought in an expensive jar of perfumed oil. She poured it on Jesus' feet, and wiped his feet with her hair.

(*'perfume' bottle*)

Judas said, 'What a waste of money!

(*person figure*)

That perfume could have been sold and the money given to the poor.'

(*purse containing coins*)

Jesus said, 'Leave her alone. She was helping me to get ready. The poor will always be here, but you will not always have me.' (*cross*)

Play

Give the children cushions, cloths, Bible storybooks and symbolic objects, and invite them to set up a special place to pray and be with Jesus.

Create

Give each child an organza bag and invite them to fill it with different scented items, e.g. lavender, rose petals, pot-pourri, cinnamon sticks, cloves, star anise, as a reminder of the story.

Praise

Provide a selection of resources, e.g. musical instruments, flags, streamers, a parachute, a bubble machine, and ask the children how they would like to worship Jesus today.

Pray

Invite the children to anoint each other by rubbing scented hand cream (or talcum powder) onto each other's hands.

Say together:

Lord, you care for us.

You let Mary care for you.

Help us to care for each other.

Amen.

Explore & respond

Choose from these ideas to help the children make connections between the Bible reading and their lives. **WEB** Templates and links to online resources. Spiritual styles key: **W**ord, **E**motion, **S**ymbol, **A**ction. Find out more **WEB** in *Worship and learning support*.

Do

Team relay

5 mins **E**

Play a game to highlight the importance of balancing faith and life

You will need: fruit, e.g. satsumas, at least two per child, two containers.

- Divide the group into two teams. Give both teams a supply of fruit (without telling them, ensure that one team has more than the other), and place a container at the opposite end of where each team is gathered.
- Both teams run relays to put one piece of fruit at a time into their container.
- When both teams have completed the task, compare the contents of their containers. They will notice that the result is unbalanced. Explain that one team's fruit represent faith and the other team's fruit represent life. If you give too much to one, the other will suffer. Distribute the fruit fairly and enjoy eating it together.

Make

Social action project

10 mins **E A**

Assemble care packages for those in need

You will need: plastic bags; EITHER toiletries for a homeless person, e.g. soap, shampoo, toothbrush, toothpaste, tissues, snacks, OR baby essentials and small gifts for a family with a new baby; tags, paper, pens, pencils, crayons.

- Invite the children to put together care packages either for homeless people in the community/a local shelter, or new young families at church/a local women's refuge.
- Tie on a tag and write a message from your church.
- The children could draw pictures or write letters to go in the bags (don't include any personal details).
- Arrange to deliver the care packages. If possible, invite some of the children to accompany you.

Treasure pot

10 mins **S**

A container for valuable things

You will need: air-drying clay/play dough, paint and paintbrushes, beads, sequins, etc.

- Mary anointed Jesus' feet with very valuable oil. Invite each child to shape a special pot to store their precious things in, e.g. notes from friends, toys, money.
- They can personalise their pots with paint and decorations. Leave them to dry.

ROOTS 100th ISSUE COMPETITION: Make treasure pots with your group and send us a photo, saying what they are going to put in them. Email your photo with the group's name, church and your contact details to the editor at cyp@rootsontheweb.com by 30 April 2019. A prize of the ROOTS book: *Seasons and Celebrations* and some fairtrade Easter goodies will be awarded to the best entries.

Pray

Balancing the scales

5 mins **W S**

Think about a balanced relationship with God

You will need: traditional weighing scales, a set of imperial and metric weights.

- Practise this exercise beforehand. Follow the script below (actions are in italics).
- We are so busy nowadays. *Place a 1lb weight on the scales. Our lives are pretty full. Place an 8oz weight on the same side. Jesus doesn't often get much of a look-in. Place a 4oz weight on the same side. Except sometimes on Sundays. Place a 500g weight in the bowl on the other side. But what if it was different? What if every day we thought about him, talked to him, spent time with him? Place a 200g weight on this side. What would our minds and hearts be like if we spent more time with Jesus? Place a 100g weight on the second side so the scales balance.*
- Talk about how this reflection made everyone feel.
- Close with a prayer: Dear Lord, please help us to remember that spending time with you is just as important as being busy. Show us ways to slow down and be with you more often. **Amen.**

Sensory prayer

5 mins **S**

Think about Jesus using all five senses

You will need: an incense stick or oil burner containing an essential oil, a clay pot/holding cross, some bread, a picture of Jesus, gentle music, e.g. 'Alabaster Box' by Julie Meyer (see *Listen* on p.29). (Note: be aware of anyone who is coeliac or suffers from asthma.)

- Lay out all the items on a rug or table as a focal point and play the music quietly.
- Encourage the children to spend some time smelling, touching, tasting, looking, listening and thinking about Jesus.

More prayers are on p.26.

Sing

WEB Abbreviations and music links* in *Hymns, songs & music*.

Under 5s	Jesus, Jesus, here I am (JU, KS) When I needed a neighbour
Under 12s	Open the Eyes of my Heart, Paul Baloche* Brother, let me be your servant (HON, SoF)*
12+	To be in your presence, Noel Richards* God of Justice (We Must Go), Tim Hughes*

See www.rootsontheweb.com

Children's Sheet and **Colouring Sheet** (Welsh versions available).

Send out

Live your faith

Encourage the children to put their faith into action. Use the idea below or give out the **Children's Sheet** **WEB**.

Make time to talk, listen and spend time with Jesus, and be on the lookout for opportunities to help others. **S A**

ROOTS YOUNG PEOPLE

Go to www.rootsontheweb.com for all templates, links and images. Find Bible notes and more prayers on p.26. Use the BIBLE section below first, then choose activities from the other sections. Extra ideas can be found in *Explore & respond* opposite.

BIBLE John 12.1-8

Warm up 5 mins E

Provide a variety of common objects, e.g. a tin of food, a book, a magazine, a pen, a small toy, a toilet roll, a cushion, a bread roll, some air freshener, a coin. Challenge the young people to take it in turns to balance as many of the objects as possible on their body at once. Award a prize to the winner.

Action Bible 15 mins W

Read aloud **John 12.1-8**, then encourage the group to use toy figures and water as perfume to act out the story.

Questions to discuss

- What emotions were felt by the key characters at different points in the story?
- Do you think Mary should have given the money to the poor instead?
- What extravagant acts of worship might be a modern-day equivalent of Jesus' anointing?


CONNECT

What's that smell? 10 mins W

Before the session starts, spray a leader in lots of perfume/ cologne. Really overdo it, but don't mention it. At this point in the session, ask the young people if they have noticed anything unusual in the room today. Talk about the fragrance and refer to verse 3 in the reading: 'the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume'. How do we show our adoration of Jesus? Does our adoration change the atmosphere around us?

Getting the balance right 10 mins W A

Beforehand, ask the church treasurer for a simple copy of the church's annual budget. Print out copies for everyone and explain financial terms as necessary. Do the young people agree with how the church spends its money? How would they change it? Make sure you pass on their suggestions!

WEB PostScript: Linking this week's reading to the news 

Listen

WEB See *Young People* page or *Hymns, songs & music* for links to these tracks.

Alabaster Box, Julie Meyer on *Paint Your Picture*
Beautiful One, Tim Hughes on *When Silence Falls*
Kaleidoscope, Urban Rescue on *Wild Heart*

EXPLORE

Multisensory challenge 10 mins E


It is important to use all our senses in our worship of God. Blindfold the young people and challenge them to use as many senses as possible in trying to identify the following items: a jar of instant coffee; a pot of flavoured yoghurt; a bar of chocolate; cinnamon bark; a bottle of fizzy drink; a lemon. Sight is allowed, but only at the end!

Did Judas have a point? 10 mins W A

Discuss the idea and purpose of social action with the group and why we have a responsibility to engage with it. Talk about your local area and possible places of need. Plan a prayer walk to visit those areas and decide on a possible social action project.



Picture pointers **WEB**

Questions for reflection 

- ▶ What do you see here: extravagance, showing off, or something else?
- ▶ How extravagant is the worship in your church?
- ▶ How do you express your devotion to Christ?

PRAY

Jesus' presence 5 mins S

Burn some incense sticks and sit in silence as the fragrance fills the room. Encourage the young people to simply soak in Jesus' presence. Alternatively, play some music, e.g. 'Alabaster Box' by Julie Meyer (see *Listen*).

Silent prayer walk 15 mins+ S A

Go on a prayer walk around your local area. Before you set off, explain that you will be stopping every few minutes to spend some time in silence. Encourage the young people to observe their surroundings and use the time to imagine themselves in other people's shoes. Afterwards, share the experience and how God might be calling each person to respond.

Live your faith

Look for an opportunity each day to worship God and to act for the good of others. **S A**