

Tyndale Thought for the Day

1st April 2020



During our time in Derby, I served as a part-time chaplain at the local psychiatric hospital. Situations and conversations there could quickly go off in rather strange directions, none more so than when one day a female patient became convinced that I was Jesus. What disconcerted me most was that she persisted in trying to kiss my feet, but fortunately an alert nurse came to my rescue. I've often thought of that incident when reading the story of the woman washing Jesus' feet with her tears and then using her hair as a towel. In his version (John 12:1–8), John identifies the woman as Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, and she anoints Jesus' feet with expensive, perfumed oil.

Just because this story appears in a gospel narrative shouldn't lessen its shock value. Even after Jesus rebukes Judas for his harsh judgement of her and reframes the whole thing as an act of devotion anticipating his death, it was undoubtedly a very odd way to behave – unsettling, sensual and, some might think, provocative.

They didn't have April Fools' Day back then, but if they had, this would have offered an excellent way to catch Jesus out, at least make him blush, or, even better, to dent his reputation. Except this wasn't a honey trap, and Mary wasn't trying to harm him. What she did was typical of her – direct, certainly naive, but utterly sincere. And Jesus' willingness to accept this unguarded, reckless display of loving devotion reveals again both his lack of self-concern and his openness to the best and worst the world might bring him.

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