



Our passage this Sunday contained two Markan 'sandwiches' – both based around meals – in Bethany (v1-11) and in Jerusalem (v12-31).

Through these events, and particularly contrasting the 'middle' event with the similar events on the 'outsides' Mark wanted his readers to see that they are to:

### 1 – **Whole-heartedly worship the one who would be killed (v1-11)**

While Jesus is reclining at the table with friends in Bethany, a woman bursts in and breaks an entire jar of precious perfume over him (v3). We, like some of those gathered there, might not feel entirely comfortable with this extravagant, uncalculated display of devotion (v4-5). But what they called "a waste" (v5), Jesus calls "a beautiful thing" (v6), saying that this woman has prepared his body for its burial, and done "what she could" (v8), and that her actions will go down in the history of the gospel (v9).

We noted that this extraordinary act was sandwiched between the chief priests' and teachers of the law's plotting against Jesus (v1-2), and Judas' offer to betray him (v10-11). A stark contrast!

We noted that, although Mark isn't expecting a wholesale personality change for believers, there is a warning here for those of us who are more reserved and pragmatic. There is a warning to make sure that our reserve doesn't hide a heart that has grown cold to Jesus, or simply failed to grasp what he is due. We considered how we might copy others, cultivate spontaneity, and care about our spiritual *emotional* lives.

### 2 – **Desperately cling to the one who would be sacrificed (v12-31)**

The rest of the passage is taken up with Jesus' final Passover meal with his followers – known as 'the Last Supper'. The heart of this meal is Jesus' institution

of the Lord's Supper (v22-26). As they sacrifice the annual Passover lamb (v12), Jesus offers up his own body and blood as a once-and-for-all sacrifice and sign of the new covenant (v24).

But this scene is sandwiched between Jesus' shocking prophecy that one of his intimate friends would betray him (v18-21), and his second shocking prophecy that all his followers would desert him (v27-31). What a relief and a blessing it is to see that the sacrifice symbolised by this meal was for followers like these - who were so weak, broken and sinful, who were just like us.

We noted that we must not fall into the trap of either thinking that we *can* or *must* be good enough for God. We are simply to "take" (v22) what Jesus offers us – his sacrifice. And we asked too, whether we miss sharing the Lord's Supper – this precious meal Jesus has given us – in church life?

Here are a few questions you might want to use with your group...

1. How do you feel about the woman's extravagant act in v3?  
How comfortably does it sit with you? Why do you think that is?
2. What do you make of the objection that the woman should have considered more carefully how best to honour Jesus (cf. John 12v6)?  
→ Where does the right line lie between spontaneity and planning, or between worship and service/social action?  
→ How do we justify our refusals to honour God as we should?
3. How is your emotional spiritual life? How much of it do you share with others?  
How can we help ourselves and each other to engage our hearts and be open?
4. How, practically, are we tempted to think that we *can* or *must* be good enough for God?  
What answer does the gospel according to Mark 12v1-31 give?
5. Be honest - do you miss sharing the Lord's Supper as a church? Why/why not?  
  
Why do we, in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Western church, perhaps not make as much of the Lord's Supper as Christians in other generations and locations have?