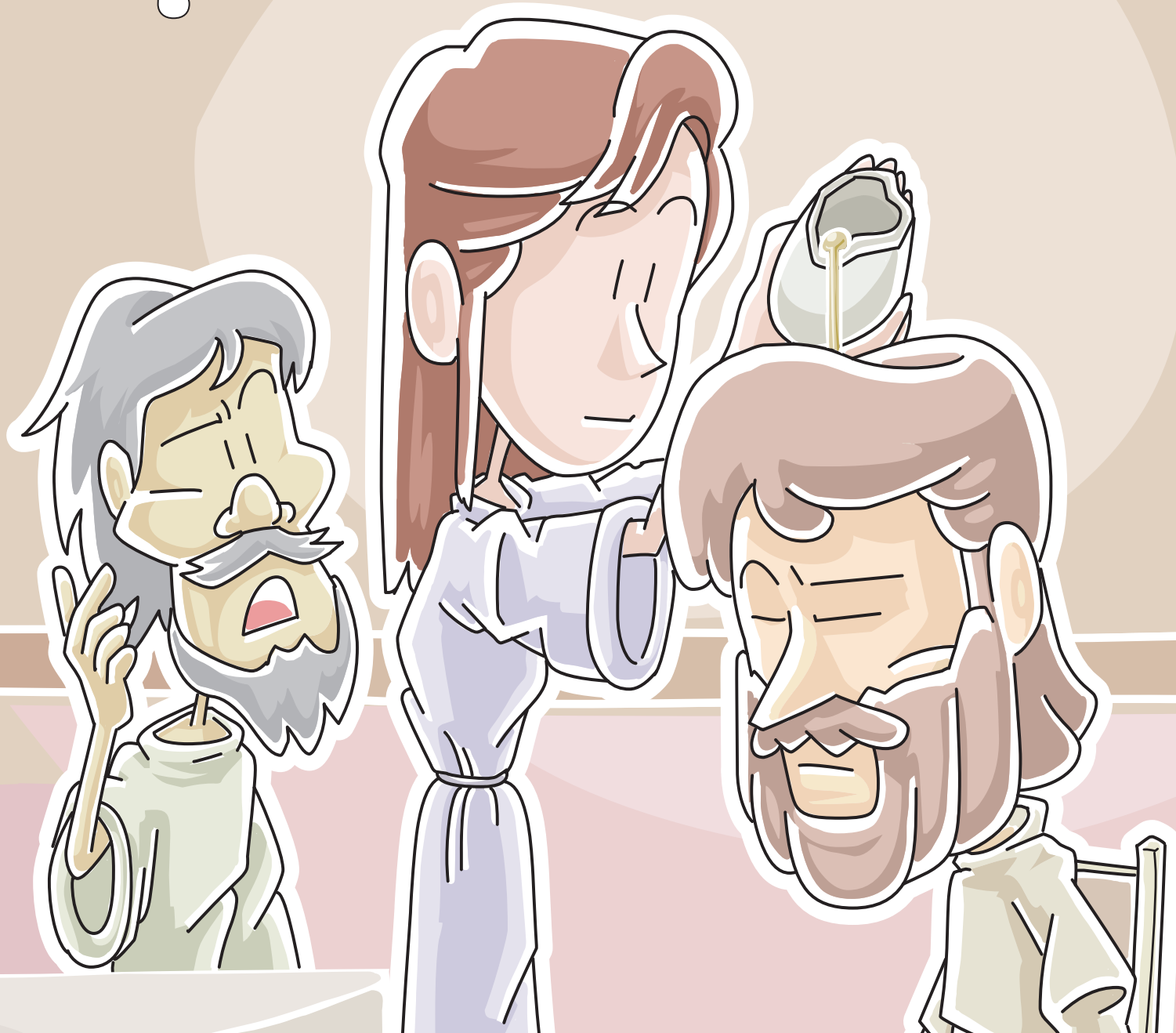


The perfume offering



Colour me!



Mark 14:1-9

It was now two days before Passover and the Festival of Thin Bread. The chief priests and the teachers of the Law of Moses were secretly planning to have Jesus arrested and put to death. They were saying, "We must not do it during the festival, because the people will riot."

Jesus was eating in Bethany at the home of Simon, who once had leprosy, when a woman came in with a very expensive bottle of sweet-smelling perfume. After breaking it open, she poured the perfume on Jesus' head. This made some of the guests angry, and they complained, "Why such a waste? We could have sold this perfume for more than three hundred silver coins and given the money to the poor!" So they started saying cruel things to the woman.

But Jesus said: "Leave her alone! Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing for me. You will always have the poor with you. And whenever you want to, you can give to them. But you won't always have me here with you. She has done all she could by pouring perfume on my body to prepare it for burial. You may be sure that wherever the good news is told all over the world, people will remember what she has done. And they will tell others."

Commentary

It seems that Jesus didn't stay in the city overnight but returned with his disciples each evening to Bethany, where Mary, Martha and Lazarus lived. In this story they are dinner guests of a man called Simon, who has been a leper (perhaps Jesus healed him), when a woman appears with expensive perfume to pour over Jesus' head. She may be Mary or Martha from nearby, or possibly another woman called Mary, nicknamed 'Magdalene', who came from Galilee and whom Jesus had dramatically healed. The guests are outraged that so much costly perfume is being wasted. It could have been wasted. It could have been spent on those in need – the elderly or the sick.

As so often, Jesus' response is a surprise. He knows that he's going to die soon, and perhaps the woman is the only other person in that room to realize this. What she is offering him is a very special gift indeed; here is someone who cares for and understands him. It is an act of kindness that everyone should hear about, Jesus tells them all, and his words have come true: the woman's story has been told right around the world, including to you today.

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Questions

- ▶ Why did Jesus and the disciples decide to stay with friends outside Jerusalem?
- ▶ Why do you think Simon invited Jesus to a meal?
- ▶ What did Jesus mean by saying, "You will always have the poor with you"? Does this mean we are not expected to give money to those in need?
- ▶ Why did the woman choose to use such expensive perfume? Wouldn't it have made more sense to use perfume that didn't cost so much?



Visual aid

Spray some perfume around and appreciate how its aroma fills the room you are in. This is what it must have been like in Simon's house when the woman poured the perfume. It was a reminder of her love for Jesus that stayed around for a long time to come.



Activity idea

What we choose to spend our money on can often cause arguments. Discuss the arguments for and against the woman's actions in the story. Was she right to spend so much on her devotion to Jesus? Were the guests justified to be so angry? Whose side was Jesus on, and why?



Prayer idea

The smell of incense or perfume is used today by Christians in some church services. It is both something beautiful for God and a picture of our prayers and worship. Using a spray-perfume bottle, allow everyone to spray a small amount of the perfume every time he or she says a prayer. Pray that the good news of Jesus will spread like the fragrance of the perfume into every corner of people's lives and around the world.

Key verse

But Jesus said, "... She has done a beautiful thing for me" (Mark 14:6).

Old Testament story link

Exodus 30:1–10: Moses gives instructions for making a special altar where incense can be burned to help people experience the special presence of God.



Colour me!

