

Date: March 13, 2016
 Scriptures: Philippians 3:4b-14; John 12:1-8
 Title: Time Is of the Essence

“You will always have the poor with you.”
 Jesus says this in response to Judas’ criticism.
 If we did not know Jesus better,
 we might think
 he doesn’t care a whit about the poor.

But, we know Jesus, don’t we?
 We know Jesus spends his life reaching out to the poor,
 both the poor in body and the poor in spirit.
 So, why does Jesus make
 such a Donald Trump statement to Judas?
 He says it,
 because he has turned his face
 toward Jerusalem.

In his book, *The Sabbath*,
 the great Jewish theologian,
 Abraham Joshua Heschel, says.
 “Judaism is a religion of time
 aiming at the sanctification of time.
 Every hour is unique
 and the only one given at that moment,
 exclusive
 and endlessly precious.”
 Because the eternal is in each moment,
 each moment is holy.

I experienced holy time Wednesday night.
 George and I had gone out to eat
 with the Bourianoff-Zalles clan.
 Afterwards,
 I went with Michelle and Juan and the two littles
 to Berry Austin, a frozen yogurt shop,
 close-by where we were eating.
 It was, as it usually is with the littles,
 an adventure in itself.
 Selecting the frozen yogurt was easy
 compared to selecting the toppings.

There was some intense negotiation
 about how many toppings would be allowed.
 Then, there was the actual selection
 of the toppings.
 That entire process took some time.
 Finally, with frozen yogurt in hand, we all sat down.

Berry Austin is an interesting shop.
 Embedded in many of the walls
 are gobs of toys
 and an eclectic mix of everyday objects.

A modified scavenger hunt,
 it's fun to try to find them.

Matthew started us off on the hunt
 calling out first one thing
 and then another.

"Grammie, can you find the space ship?
 Where's the camera, Grammie?"

Soon, Nico was scooting around on the floor
 looking for things.

I was sitting there in the big mix of it all,
 laughing and talking with the family.

Matthew called out,
 "Grammie, can you find the three balls?"

It was then that it happened.

Then, that a veil lifted,
 and I experienced that ordinary moment
 as exclusive and endlessly precious,
 as holy.

In that moment,
 I saw with complete clarity
 that our ordinary moments
 are the eternal encapsulated in time.

Jesus has set his face for Jerusalem.
 He knows what awaits him there.
 His disciples are traveling with him.
 On the way,
 he stops at the home of
 Martha, Mary, and Lazarus.
 The three siblings are like family to him.

Martha,
 who is known for her hospitality and good cooking,
 prepares a meal for her unexpected
 but most welcome guests.
 They are doing the most ordinary of things ~
 cooking in the kitchen,
 gathering around a table,
 laughing and talking,
 sharing their lives with one another.

After the meal,
 Mary tiptoes into the room.
 In her hands is a jar of costly aromatic oils.
 Walking to the place where Jesus is sitting,
 she kneels at his feet.
 As she does,
 the men grow silent and begin watching her.
 To everyone's amazement,
 she very carefully and tenderly
 removes Jesus' sandals
 and begins anointing his feet.

Washing the feet of another is a servant's job.
 Certainly, it is not Mary's,
 who though as close as family
 was not family.
 Many of the streets in the villages and cities
 are little more than open sewers.
 As people walk about,
 their sandaled feet get filthy.
 No matter,
 that night Mary takes it upon herself
 to wash Jesus' feet.
 She uses costly aromatic oils.

Though a dab would have been sufficient,
 Mary is not content with a dab.
 Using a lavish amount of oil,
 she pours it over Jesus' callused heels
 and the tops of his feet
 until it runs between his toes

and onto the floor.

But, Mary does not stop there.

She unbinds her hair,

an outrageous thing to do outside the family,
and wipes Jesus' feet with it.

I wonder if the people watching

realize they are witnessing a holy moment.

Realize they are seeing the eternal grace of God
encapsulated in time.

Clearly, Judas does not see,

does not understand

the deep meaning of Mary's actions .

He barks,

"Why wasn't this oil sold

and the money given to the poor?"

Though he feigns concern for the poor,

Judas is actually more interested
in the money than the poor.

He controls the group's money.

Seeing through Judas' ruse, Jesus says,

"Let her alone.

You will always have the poor with you.

You won't always have me."

The poor will always be with us,

because many of us use time –

the seemingly endless moments of our lives –
for one end only,

to promote ourselves and our well being.

This behavior gets multiplied and embedded

in the systems of the world,

which support and promote the well-being
of the powerful elite

and effectively keeps the poor, poor.

Jesus goes to Jerusalem

to stand against the powerful elite

and proclaim through his actions

release for all the world's Captives ,
including the poor.

There cannot be and must not be any doubt

that Jesus cares for the poor.
Yet, there is something larger
than the world's poor
on Jesus' mind that night.
That something larger is the reality
that his hour, his death, is fast approaching.
No longer will he be
with the people he loves.
No longer will he sit
and break bread with them
as he is doing that evening.
No longer will they be able to touch him
or hear his voice
or see his smile.
No longer will he be
physically present with them.
And that day, that night, that very moment
must be acknowledged
and celebrated for what it is,
an endlessly precious and holy moment.
Having recognized that moment for what it is,
Mary seizes the opportunity to show Jesus
how much she loves and appreciates him.

Time is of the essence.
Life is an uncertain thing.
We never know what might happen.
We think
about thanking people
or praising them
or telling them we love them.
Then, we put it off.
We let the days slide into weeks
and the weeks into months
and the months into years,
and the words we meant to speak never get spoken,
the letter never gets written
the call never gets made.
The opportunity comes along
to speak a loving word
or to be kind to someone,

but before we get around to it,
 the opportunity is gone
 and our best intention remains
 just that,
 our best intention.

The moments come and go so quickly.
 We hardly notice them for what they are,
 hardly notice them slipping by.
 Once they are gone,
 they are gone forever.
 Those moments cannot be retrieved,
 and we may never have another opportunity to enjoy the simple pleasure of
 being with them,
 or to speak a loving word
 or to show kindness to the person again.

Our lives are so busy,
 frantically we move
 from one thing to another.
 To see the holy in the ordinary,
 we have to slow down, open our eyes,
 and breathe in the moment.
 Doing that allows us to see
 that each moment is
 holy and endlessly precious.
 Doing that inspires us to seize the opportunities
 to be kind and loving as they appear.
 Perhaps, one of God's purposes
 in giving us the Sabbath
 is to help us slow down
 and open our eyes.

As the fragrance of the costly oils
 settles into every nook and cranny of the house,
 Mary opens our eyes to the holiness
 of that night.
 As the sweet fragrance of his love fills the world
 when the cross pierces his flesh
 and takes him to its arms,
 Jesus opens our eyes

to the holiness of our life,
our daily,
ordinary life.

All of our moments are
exclusive and endlessly precious.

May we who have been blessed
by the fragrant and holy offering of Jesus' life
be a fragrant and holy blessings to others.
Amen.