

¹Six days before the Passover, Jesus therefore came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. ²So they gave a dinner for him there. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him at the table. ³Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. ⁴But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was about to betray him), said, ⁵“Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?” ⁶He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it. ⁷Jesus said, “Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of my burial. ⁸For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me.”

And I'm wondering – did you work any this past week on what was printed in the bulletin last Sunday as GOSPEL MEMORY VERSE:

³²And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all things to myself

Maybe? Let's say it together again, today. For, even though we used it last Sunday, we're going to remember it again today: **And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all things to myself**

Let me also remind us of what we have been looking at, as our theme, during this season of Lent:

HOW DO WE PREPARE OURSELVES TO REALLY ACCEPT THE
MYSTERY OF EASTER – THE INCONSISTENT-WITH-ANYTHING-ELSE-IN
LIFE-OUR-FIVE-SENSES-HAVE-EXPERIENCED-THING – THE
RESURRECTION? AND THE ANSWER IS MYSTERIUM.

Here we have – John is careful to point out – an experience within a week of when Jesus goes into the Upper Room with His disciples to celebrate the Passover, and to begin what we call The Last Supper ... to begin that chain of events of Maundy Thursday's betrayal by Judas into the hands of the soldiers and Jesus' kangaroo court proceedings, which lead to the Crucifixion of Good Friday and the Resurrection of Easter. WITHIN SIX DAYS of that fateful beginning, Jesus is gathered with his disciples, including Jesus, in the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus (whom Jesus had earlier raised from the dead.)

Mary is showing her deep affection for Jesus, with an anointing that cost about a year's worth of wages (300 denarii.) The third person (besides Jesus and Mary) to highlight this story in John's telling is, of course, Judas Iscariot – Judas the betrayer, Judas who had indeed been one of "THE CHOSEN."

John frames Mary and Judas together in sharp relief – the blessed one, whose act of overwhelming generous devotion is one of the very few stories that is repeated in every one of the Gospels – and Judas ... Judas the lost one.

In that great Bible scholar and theologian Karl Barth's 500 page book on salvation, he spends 48 pages talking about just this incident. His penetrating question that I lift for us is this: **IS JUDAS, TOO, REDEEMED BY THE REDEMPTIVE WORK OF JESUS?**

Time prohibits my sharing all 48 pages of Barth's analysis, but after all of it, he ends with this notion:

That's a tough proposition. Surely Judas became one of the lost. BUT, when Jesus said, a few verses later: *And I, when I am lifted up, will draw all things unto me* (our Gospel memory verse from last week) who is willing to exclude Judas, too, from that redemption. If Jesus came to save the lost, then who is going to disqualify Judas from that saving?

The former senior pastor of Saint Marks (my pastor in high school and college, when he served a different church), the Rev'd Dr. Frank L. Shaffer, Jr., once recited to this congregation from this pulpit, the ending of his favorite poem of his favorite poet, Edwin Muir, a poem called *The Transfiguration*. It ends with these words:

**But he will come again, it's said, though not
Unwanted and unsummoned; for all things,
Beasts of the field, and woods, and rocks, and seas,
And all mankind from end to end of the earth
Will call him with one voice. In our own time,
Some say, or at a time when time is ripe.
Then he will come, Christ the uncrucified,
Christ the discrucified, his death undone,
His agony unmade, his cross dismantled—
Glad to be so—and the tormented wood
Will cure its hurt and grow into a tree**

**In a green springing corner of young Eden,
And Judas damned take his long journey backward
From darkness into light and be a child
Beside his mother's knee, and the betrayal
Be quite undone and never more be done.**

Really? Judas damned will journey backwards to his mother's knee and the betrayal be quite undone and never more be done? Really? That's hard stuff, my friends.

Who else is this redemptive work of Jesus going to save? Think of the worst villain in your mind, and try to picture that person being drawn up unto Jesus, forgiven, and undamned.

Well – that kind of notion is about as hard to deal with as the whole notion of the RESURRECTION. And that's where mysterium come into play.

In our Monday night class, this past week, we were introduced to a notion of contemplation, defined thusly:

The combination of observation along with reverence and love – and not involving any resistance, judgment, analysis, or labeling.

This practice of contemplation takes us out of what we have been so used to doing, ever since we ate that darned apple – the knowledge of good and evil – in the Garden, before we were ready to do so. And, as our punishment, we have been eating of it ever since. That has been our curse, and we are so used to it – judging, analyzing, and labeling – that it's hard for us to get around it.

But THAT is exactly the practice that enables us to experience the RECONCILIATION that we learned last Sunday is God's whole gig. (For those not here last week, please check 2 Corinthians 5:17-20.) RECONCILIATION

Here is how it works – and I discovered it when I was walking Rooney one night. I was walking along in the darkness of the final hour of the day, when I saw the tail lights of a car, about ½ a block away. The driver had put on the brakes, and that red light had grown so bright. And then, the driver moved the gear shifter into reverse, and the little white light in the center of those much larger, penetrating, red lights came on. And when that little white

backup light came on, the red light was swallowed up. Even though the plastic lens on the taillight/brake light covered many more square inches than the backup light, the white backup light consumed it.

That's what moments of the MYSTERIUM penetrating through our days can do to our religion.

Some of you might remember an old custom, not much practiced anymore, called "BLUE DOTTING." It was a similar phenomenon: a small hole would be drilled through the red taillight lens cover and a piece of blue plastic would be taped over that hole, on the inside of the tail light. Even though it was just a tiny little opening covered up by the blue dot, whenever the taillight/brake light came on, it was a bright purple. The little blue dot changed everything.

That's what happens when we practice contemplation and open ourselves up to the mysterium of God to break into our lives.

We see little snippets of where it has happened in the Bible. Let me give you an example from probably everybody's favorite psalm. What is that? Yes, Psalm 23. We all love it ... except for perhaps that fifth verse: **Thou prepares a table before me IN THE PRESENCE OF MINE ENEMIES.**

Really? That is what heaven is like, where we join together at the heavenly banquet table with our enemies?

**Then he will come, Christ the uncrucified,
Christ the discrucified, his death undone,
His agony unmade, his cross dismantled—
Glad to be so—and the tormented wood
Will cure its hurt and grow into a tree
In a green springing corner of young Eden,
And Judas damned take his long journey backward
From darkness into light and be a child
Beside his mother's knee, and the betrayal
Be quite undone and never more be done.**

That doesn't make any more sense to us ... than the Resurrection. If we are going to prepare for the Glory of Easter, then we must allow the Blue Dot of Mysterium to change our

thinking. To take us beyond the **resistance, judgment, analysis, or labeling** that we are so comfortable – BY HABIT – to do.

These acts of practicing contemplation open us up to the religion that mere thinking and analysis prevents us from experiencing.

One scholar of mysterium puts it like this:

What our generation seems to living through is the understanding that rationalism is only part of the answer. [The places with more colleges and churches per square mile than anywhere on earth – Germany – gave us two world wars, in their rationalism.] There is this sense that religion has to be more than rationalism. And mysterium offers us something like this: From over in the corner comes this voice, which says, ***Psst! Hey, kid! How would you like a direct experience of God? Would that help your religious life?*** And a lot of people, when they experience that – come to realize the power of the Mysterium to transform their whole lives.

Jesus said “**Judge not.**” And **until** each one of us follows Jesus’ prescription to daily **take up our cross**, *i.e.* deny ourself of the habit of judging, analyzing, and labeling – **then** we are not going to be able to follow Jesus.

Are you willing to let go? Are you willing to let God re-shape how you see people and how you see life? Are you willing to experience the RESURRECTION as something REAL IN YOUR LIFE, and not just put it into your billfold as an end of life, **Get out of Hell, Free** card.

That’s what Alexa and Christopher said in the answer to questions – and most, if not all, of us have answered in response to the same questions of Baptism: **Do you accept the freedom and power that God gives you to overcome evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves? Do you accept the freedom and power that God gives you ...?** You can’t do it on your own. Mere rational thinking will not be enough.

You have to let go, and let God – it only takes a little bit of mysterium to do it – one little blue dot is enough.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.