



“A Target on your back”

BY PASTOR JOHN HILLMER

Palm Sunday – brief meditation before reading the Passion narrative according to St. Mark

My first call in ministry was in Royal Oak, MI. Part of my call was to work with youth. The high school youth group held a Seder Meal the Friday before Palm Sunday. The Seder for the whole congregation had a turnout of about 150. Afterward, the clean-up was done by the youth. Unbeknownst to me, some of the teenagers were disposing of some of the unfinished wine glasses on the tables, in a very resourceful way. Not wanting to waste the wine, they drained them!

One junior in this high school group was the daughter of a very prominent member of the church, and the daughter he picked up that night afterward, was not the daughter he dropped off that afternoon. I had a phone call the next morning from one irate father. “How could you let this happen?” He wanted me “out of there” as a pastor of that congregation, and he was threatening to make sure I was “out of the church” completely. Fortunately, my supervising pastor defended me; we worked out a process of reconciliation assurances, with the irate father.

I tell that story because I had a ‘target on my back’ and all that goes with that. I also had someone who ‘had my back’.

The Passion Narrative in Mark begins with a woman who did an amazing thing. Excessive and amazing! She spent a great deal of money (all of her excess) on perfumed oil and ointment. This was not ordinary ageing spot-remover or wrinkle cream – it was pure – rare nard. She poured the ointment on Jesus’ head. This unnamed woman anointed Jesus with the whole jar!

Response? Did she ever catch the ire of the elite! She was criticized severely. She had a target on her back! But Jesus defended her. "Let her alone!" She has done a beautiful thing. Jesus 'had her back'.

But this woman - unnamed – we know her not. Her name is unknown to the whole world these thousands of year, and yet we know what she did. She KNEW. She COULD TELL what's up. A dinner in the house of Simon the Leper, an outcast, who was healed and welcomed by Jesus. Showing now his hospitality by welcoming others: tax collectors, sinners, and women. The whole evening dinner smacked of an outcast event. "Ne'er do-wells" all.

She knew how this would all unfold. She knew how the 'establishment' worked – how the forces would align and work so effectively as they always do. That they would silence him, Jesus. What she did was prophetic. Jesus never WAS anointed after burial. The Resurrection took care of that. But THIS woman – before his death – and she knew it was coming – anointed him. A precious, costly, action. As such -she had a target on her back.

I know every one of you here at some point in your life, have had a target on your back that someone else put there. Remember how it felt. Now think also, how powerful and uplifting it is, when someone has YOUR back. It is nothing short of life-giving.

More than anyone else in all history, Jesus had a target on his back. What strength and courage, to carry on. What FAITH! What PURPOSE! Who had Jesus' back?

That is something to ponder as we read the Passion Narrative according to St. Mark.

Amen.