

Track 1 *or*

[1 Kings 21:1-10,
\(11-14\), 15-21a](#)

[Psalm 5:1-8](#)

[Galatians 2:15-21](#)

[Luke 7:36-8:3](#)

Track 2

[2 Samuel 11:26-12:10, 13-15](#)

[Psalm 32](#)

[Galatians 2:15-21](#)

[Luke 7:36-8:3](#)

A SERMON PREACHED BY THE REVEREND ALISTAIR SO, S.O.SC., RECTOR OF ALL HALLOWS PARISH, SOUTH RIVER, IN DAVIDSONVILLE, MARYLAND, ON THE FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, JUNE 16TH, 2013, AT ALL HALLOWS' CHAPEL AND THE BRICK CHURCH

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

We often hear that what really matters is what's in our hearts. We can do without the outward and material stuff. But can we really? Take mourning a loved one, for instance. It would be quite unlikely, wouldn't it, if we were to skip the funeral, cards, reception and commemoration, for our deceased loved one? What's in our hearts affects how we behave and how we use our resources, both material and spiritual.

In the opening scene of the highly popular British soap opera, Downton Abbey, the tragic news of the sinking of the Titanic comes to the Abbey, causing much chaos, as the only two male heirs of Lord Grantham went down with the ship. His wife, Cora, instructs their three daughters to wear black for a month in mourning. That's theoretically supposed to be an outward manifestation of their inward grief and sorrows.

I also recall, at a workshop following the Chapel Sesquicentennial Celebration, learning about various Victorian mourning traditions. I saw a silver and glass tube in which ladies would collect their tears. A physical and material memento of their broken hearts, if you will.

And through the hard work and the spirit of discovery of our Cemetery Committee, not long ago we located and excavated a grave of a child buried in our Brick Church cemetery. When the stones were put back together, they formed the shape of a crib. A tribute to the tender love and sorrow for someone who died too young.

We all grieve and mourn in various ways. We express what's in our hearts in different ways. Today, we may not always wear black for a month after the death of a loved one. We may not collect our tears in little bottles. But we commemorate and

celebrate in different ways, such as giving to a charity in the name of the departed loved one or doing something that he or she would like us to do.

And publicly, we still see symbols of mourning, such as flying the flag half-staff, and military honors, for those who have died in service of our country. Those symbols catch our attention and remind us of something important, something painful and formative in our collective narrative as a people, as a nation.

You see, when the flag is flying half-staff, it makes people ask questions. And when we put on special clothes for different occasions, some people also ask questions. When people in earlier generations donned on their mourning outfits, they did not have to tell people that they were mourning. Others would know by looking at the color and the style of the clothing. And when they did ask questions, it was assumed that they would ask with the knowledge that someone had passed away.

In our Gospel lesson, today, we have the very unique story of the anointing of Jesus' feet by a certain woman of the village he was visiting.

She learned that Jesus was a guest in the home of the Pharisee. So, she came with a bottle of very expensive perfume and stood at his feet, weeping, raining tears on his feet. Letting down her hair, she dried his feet, kissed them, and anointed them with the perfume.

The Pharisee in the story focused on the conflict between clean and unclean, saying, "If this man was the prophet I thought he was, he would have known what kind of woman this is who is falling all over him."

But such conventions didn't bother Jesus. He praised her for her faith and devotion and pronounced the forgiveness of her sins.

Now, the important lesson here is really embedded in the symbolism of the event. It's about using our temporal and material gifts for a greater purpose. And in this case, the greater purpose is preparing the Lord for his impending burial.

In performing the so-called "last rites" for a person near death, I generally use the prayers and Litany for the Time of Death in the prayer book, and anoint the patient with holy chrism designated for the sick, first on the forehead, then the hands and then the feet.

You see, the church has taken on the anointing of the feet as a preparation for death, for entrance into eternal life.

To outsiders, her action may seem strange. But for those in the know, her action is a prelude to the Paschal Mystery so central to our faith tradition - the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ our Savior.

The foreshadowing of the death of Jesus may not be very apparent here in Luke. But if we look at the similar story told in Mark 14:3-9, we can see Jesus responding to the complaints about the wastefulness of the action of this woman. He said,
 "For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me."

"..but you will not always have me."

The pious female disciple in this Gospel story understood that.

We may not like to think about it, but none of us will be here forever.

And it is especially hard when we lose our loved ones.

Honoring their memory and legacy is a charism of the church. Honoring their memory and legacy is a gift of the church. Our cemeteries are a standing and living testament to that very gift of the church.

This past week, a group of us went to the Maryland State Archives to view some of the early documents of All Hallows. For the first time, in person, I was able to inspect the the first birth record written in ink on vellum, indicating the existence of All Hallows.

*Thomas, son of Richard and Ellinor Shonff his wife,
 was born 1 day of March 1669 in All Hallows, South River Parish.*

The church prays for all of us here. The church prays also for all those who have gone before us. Our Catechism says, "we pray for [the dead], because we still hold them in our love, and because we trust that in God's presence those who have chosen to serve him will grow in his love, until they see him as he is."

Not long ago, I showed a visitor the crib-shaped grave at the Brick Church cemetery. She said, "I even feel sad now, for the parents and the child, some one hundred and sixty years later..."

I wonder how many people a hundred, two hundred or more years later will come across our records - the records of our baptism, marriage and burial - perhaps our headstones in the cemetery. I wonder how many of them will wonder about our lives, our work and our ministry here. I wonder how our stories will touch their hearts.

The anointing of Jesus' feet in today's Gospel effectively became part of his last rites, if you will. The Lord was prepared. By God's grace, may we all be prepared for the time when the Lord calls us home.

What kind of legacy that reflects our hearts do we want to place for the future generations?

And very importantly, let's remember the story doesn't end at Golgotha - that crucified place. Rather, the story leads us to that resurrection place - the empty tomb - the inauguration of the eighth day of the week beyond and above creation!

With that hope, my brothers and sisters, even when we pass through the valley of the shadow of death, let us fear no evil for under all circumstances, we can trust in the protection by the rod and the staff of the Good Shepherd!

Amen.