Anointed to Rise Up
A Sermon for Pilgrim Congregational Church, UCC, Lexington
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SCRIPTURE READING John 12:1-8 Doug
Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. **2** There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him. **3** Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus's feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. **4** But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, **5** "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" **6** (He said this not because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) **7** Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. **8** You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."

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Prayer

Oh Pilgrims. This week has been a lot. The world, the news, our fears, our grief. From what folks are going through individually - to devastating headlines, it has been some week. On Wednesday when I saw the anthem title, I thought - that's too heavy. And today, *When Jesus Wept* seems apt.

And it's also apt for our text, when you put it in context. This dinner in Bethany came as Jesus drew closer and closer to Jerusalem, closer and closer to his betrayal, his arrest, his death. When Jesus wept…Jesus, whom our faith says was truly human as well as divine, knew that speaking

for justice, practicing healing and compassion, teaching the Kindom of God would lead to pain. Jesus had called people to rise up - a little girl everyone thought was dead - a friend who was already buried, a whole people facing destruction. So maybe Jesus' heart was breaking for the people under the heel of empire, and for the personal danger that was approaching.

But none of the twelve got it. They could not see what was coming. They would not see what was coming.

Into this moment of fear and sadness came Mary of Bethany. She understood in a way none of the twelve do; she could see Jesus' grief and fear and she responded with a breathtaking kindness. A "brazen act of beauty"[1] that declared her faith and her adoration. A preparation for death - and a powerful anointing for rising. Pouring luxurious and fragrant oil on Jesus' feet, letting her hair down like a waterfall, is a moment tender and compassionate. Larissa Kwong Abazia says of this moment: "beauty is an act of love….It is embodied, broken open, and poured out."[2] Jesus was anointed for burial - and for resurrection.

Jesus, who was about to die - was anointed by Mary of Bethany with the strength to rise up.

Rise up!

Jesus helped the little girl and Lazarus to rise up.

Jesus called the people to rise up.

And Mary of Bethany in her anointing helped Jesus to make it past the cross, to rise up.

[1] Sanctified Art Filled to the Brim Lenten series commentary.
[2] Ibid

And that means something today. Because there are things we need to remember, when the world is so troubled.

God sent Jesus to us, an extravagant gift of love poured out like a waterfall.

Understanding so clearly Jesus as a gift of love, Mary of Bethany poured out her own love.

And here's where it comes to us.

When the world is so troubled, we have to grab on to everything that gives us courage, every sign of hope, every anointing, every pouring out of beauty. Right now Creation itself is rising up (in this hemisphere) so take hold of that beauty.

And we are going to anoint the world and our loved ones and accept the anointing that is offered to us that we might all rise up.
May it be so.

Amen.