

When I was young(er) I hated my name – Judy Arnold – it seemed that it was a combination of two notorious traitors – Judas Iscariot and Benedict Arnold. I was afraid it was destiny as well as coincidence - that I would be like one of them. And while I can report that I have not betrayed my country or my savior, I suspect I might be like Judas in some other ways.

At this meal, I imagine him in the doorway, leaning against the wall, his arms folded across his chest - holding himself a little apart. For some reason I imagine him like Riff in West Side Story – one of the Jets. If I were Will I would sing “When you’re a Jet, you’re a Jet all the way.” Now. But alas, I’m not. But the comparison holds. Judas sees himself as a member of the gang – an insider and he isn’t happy about their being at Lazarus’ house. The dynamic changes with other people present, especially those who know Jesus in a different way. Judas likes being an insider and the only way to be an insider is to label others outsiders.

There has been more than one time when I’ve been in our group of friends and someone brings a friend to a gathering and I’ve heard myself think “why did she bring HER?” My concern being more for whether I would get the attention I crave than in welcoming and getting to know someone new. I know Judas’s desire to have Jesus and the disciples on their own, with no interlopers, no outsiders.

His discontent continues when Mary’s love of Jesus is poured out with such abandon, with so little regard to the value of the precious oil and with such great regard for Jesus. Judas is full of judgment. As she pours the oil, he is astounded. Instead of a dollop, she pours the whole pound – an amount which today would be around \$25,000. I don’t want to reveal my petty mindedness, but I can imagine my own reaction to Mary’s gesture. Initial surprise followed by defensiveness – knowing that I would be very judicious in the use of such an expensive commodity. Mary’s unbounded generosity would shame me; shamed Judas. And, he sees an opportunity to shift the focus to him and to label Mary as an outsider at the same time. Sure of Jesus’ support, he chastises her loudly. When Jesus rebukes him, Judas shrinks from embarrassment – it wouldn’t surprise me if that was the very moment he decided to betray Jesus, to repay him for what feels like being pushed away.

Yet, Judas has not done something so outrageous. He only wanted to define things, to know who is in and who is out; to clarify how much oil should offered to an honored guest. He only wanted to understand the limits, to know where they are. I understand. I too want to know the limits, we want to know the limits. Who is our neighbor? How many times should we forgive? Who’s in and who’s out – who’s a Jet and who’s a Shark. That’s what shines light on the counter culture of the gospel – the secular world is all about who belongs and who doesn’t; who is worthy and who isn’t; who is legal and who is not. We can almost hear Jesus thinking, “Judas, you just don’t get it, do you?” “Judy, you just don’t get it, do you?”

When we seek to know the limits – it isn't because we want to make sure we give as much as possible; nor because we want to include as many people as possible – as many drug dealers and prisoners; to give as much as we can – to mortgage the church and strip ourselves of our expensive baubles. We don't want to know limits so we can reach them. We want to know limits so we can know when we can stop, when we can say we've welcomed enough people; made enough sandwiches; given enough money; we want to know when we can say, there, that's enough oil. I'll save the rest for another day.

We are eager for limits – yes, so we can know when we can stop – but also so we can know when it's safe to begin. I've often tried to discern that – if I give money to a person on the street, why don't I then invite him for a meal, and if I invite him for a meal, why don't I ask him to spend the night; if I ask him to spend the night, why don't I have him move in, if I ask HIM to move in – well, you get the idea. I want to know when I can stop as if I am in danger of filling my house with homeless people. When I lived in Belgium my roommate was always afraid she'd learn French with a Belgian accent. If your French is so good no one knows you're an American that's amazing. If your generosity is so boundless that your house is filled with strangers, you are living the gospel to the fullest and basking in it. Most of us are not in danger of going overboard – but we often let the fear of that stop us.

The gospel is not about drawing lines between enough and too much; not about going to Jerusalem but not to Calvary; it is not about letting yourself be arrested but not succumbing to crucifixion. The gospel is about not holding back – it IS about giving what is asked; about opening to the person on the doorstep no matter who she is; about pouring out your love without worrying when it will run out because when it is the gospel we are responding to, it is Jesus' love you are sharing and it will never run out.