

**Sermon preached at the Eucharist at Holy Trinity  
on Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> March 2010**

**Isaiah 43 v.16-21**

**John 12 v.1-8**

May I speak in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

In his book *The Four Loves* C.S. Lewis says that while lovers long to look into each others' eyes, friends stand side by side looking toward the common interests that drew them together and made them friends in the first place. Many of us would say that we have, or have had, a lot of friendships at work, because we are striving, however fractiously, towards a common goal, and there is a great reward in sharing the struggles of working life with one another. And then you move on from that particular job, or you retire, and you find that most of those friendships fade in their intensity, simply because there is no longer a common goal. In my own recent experience I went off to be a priest and my friends at work carried on researching Russian History or teaching crystallography, and so it's nice to see each other now, but not so very necessary. Except, except for a few. And those few are very necessary to me. We are no longer looking towards the common interests that originally drew us together. We stand side by side, conscious of each other's needs, conscious of each other's history, and conscious of each other's potential. But we don't always know our friends' full potential, or completely understand the purposes they have set themselves in life, or to what they might be called. We only know that we would want to be beside them as we experience the changing shades of light and darkness of our lives. Like walking in the country in the sunshine of this early spring time. We sense the joy of new growth, the sheer vigour of the countryside coming into new life. And so we sense the never ending potential for growth in our own life and in the lives of our friends. Yet at the same time we know the dark clouds of winter can roll back and darkness enter our lives. And the future is unknowable, exciting, mysterious, daunting.

And so it must have been that evening in Bethany. Jesus was rich in friends and found great joy in them. Many of his contemporaries criticised him for his choice of friends, because in the eyes of the world these men and women were thought of as sinners. But those who were there that evening were his close friends, those who had been with him on his physical and spiritual journeying and who now shared the danger of being so near to Jerusalem with a man whose life was sought by the authorities. You can sense the edginess of it all. For the future is unknowable, exciting, mysterious, daunting. And the understanding of what is about to happen and is happening is not shared. The circle of friendship is under great strain. Those bonds of love might break, simply because the truth of Jesus' very being and his work on earth, its incredible potential, its ability to break and make anew, eludes our understanding. Martha knows that service is holy, that table fellowship creates community, but she may not know to what height and depth Jesus will offer his own servanthood. Judas knows that Jesus is passionate for the poor, that he has taught his disciples to discern the blessedness of those who are poor. Judas knows that Jesus is seeking to make all things new, and is deeply frustrated at the direction Jesus is now taking. 'You always have the poor with you' seems to Judas to be the towel thrown into the ring. The ultimate consideration of the things of old. Mary in

her extravagant and shocking gesture of anointing Jesus with the costly perfume reveals her understanding of Jesus' kingship and the way of suffering he has chosen to be a servant to God's people. But she cannot communicate that understanding to her family and her friends. Only Jesus understands where Mary has reached in her understanding of what he is, and what he will do. Jesus tells Judas to leave her alone. But the head on clash between Judas and Mary needs to resonate and reverberate in our own church and in our own lives. When friends fall out like that we are left with a totally false dichotomy, for in recognising the kingship of Christ we are most certainly not given a licence to ignore the needs of others, especially the poor and vulnerable.

So the circle of close friendship surrounding Jesus that evening in Bethany may break under the strain of the future, for the future is unknowable, exciting, mysterious, daunting. And so it happens in our lives, for the love of friends is vulnerable, for we are not perfect. And the loving friendship we bear to God may also break under the strain of the unknowable, the exciting, the mysterious and the daunting, for we are not perfect. But the loving friendship Christ bears for us, what of that? In John's account of the Last Supper, Jesus says 'I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing, but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.' The loving friendship Christ bears for us does not change, for he is perfect in friendship. The incarnate God has called us friends. In other words, he has invited us into a relationship. When we accept this invitation, our friendship with God in Christ deepens. It will become intimate. In that friendship Christ will work through us so that we are joined with him in the work of making all things new. Each of us knows best how we can help bring in God's kingdom on earth as in heaven. Our resolve and our joy is to let the friendship of Christ flow through us like the spring waters now gushing through our meadows. Amen.