

Open Your Hand Wide to Your Brother

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Scriptures:

John 12:1-8

Deuteronomy 15:7-11

When we read the story of Mary anointing Jesus with that precious ointment and how Jesus responded to the reaction of Judas Iscariot, many people are left wondering exactly what Jesus meant when he said poverty is a reality that never goes away. To really understand this we need to look at the history of where the phrase came from.

If we were having a conversation and I said to you "when in Rome" you would probably know that I had only quoted part of that idiom. It ends with "do as the Romans do", I wouldn't need to say the whole thing. Those who were sitting with Jesus when Mary broke that alabaster box and the whole house was filled with its wonderful fragrance, would have witnessed the outrage of Judas who accused her of wasting money and ignoring the poverty that was ever present. And they would have heard and completely understood what Jesus then said. He was quoting part of the Torah, words that they had all been brought up learning and they would have known both the context and the full rendition. Jesus didn't need to quote it all, His audience knew exactly what He was saying:

*"If among you, one of your brothers should become poor, in any of your towns within your land that the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother, but you shall open your hand to him and lend him sufficient for his need, whatever it may be...**For the poor you will always have with you in the land. Therefore I command you, 'You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in your land.'**" (Deut 15:7-11)*

This is a wonderful example of the way that the Old Testament is always a foreshadowing of the life of Christ and the New Testament is an absolute confirmation and fulfilment of this. The instruction to care for the poor and needy in our lands came from Yahweh and was confirmed by both the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, the Messiah who had been promised.

As we go about our daily lives in these strangest of times, so many around us are facing redundancy, loss of income, cut backs in their ability to feed their families and pay all their bills. As people of God, followers of His Son Jesus the Christ, we cannot shut our eyes to the upsurge of need in our communities. But when we look around, we never need to feel daunted by how big this issue is. Mother Teresa was famously quoted as saying that dealing with the enormity of the task she had before her always began with dealing with the one in front of her.

There is a saying that I cannot find the origin of: "The smallest deed far outweighs the greatest of intentions". We can think about and try to make plans for solving the world's problems, but to make a shepherd's pie and pop it around to a solo parent means that they will eat tonight. There is nothing wrong with finding solutions that feed many, equally, there is absolutely

nothing wrong with feeding the one. When Holy Spirit prompts us to move, we cannot ignore Him, even if we feel it's such a small thing. "Ours is not to reason why" I don't need to finish it.

We are surrounded by poverty, not merely financial poverty; poverty of spirit, poverty of family, poverty of joy are all a reality for many, many people today. The poor come in many guises, none of which we can ignore, all of which God sees.

Prayer: Abba Father, stir our hearts, fire our Spirit to heed what Jesus said. Poverty is all around us and we must open our hands wide, through the power and anointing of Jesus, Amen.