

“Salvation by Gathering” in the Gospel according to John : A New Look at John 12 : 1 - 7

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This article focuses on the theological significance of the anointing of Jesus at Bethany in light of the passion and death of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel. It responds to the conclusion of earlier 20th century scholarship that John 12:1-7 is essentially meaningful as a text that evolved from an oral tradition comparable to other anointings of Jesus with perfume in the Synoptic Gospels. It supplements this prior scholarly study by focusing on the literary context of the Bethany anointing within the Fourth Gospel and its sociohistorical context in light of biblical and extra-biblical texts of the first-century. It demonstrates how, especially for first-century readers, the anointing episode in the Fourth Gospel served to anticipate Mary as kinswoman of Jesus and sister of those whom Jesus will call “my brothers” (John 20:17). The result is a text that also points modern-day readers bereft of community to a new community of God gathered through the death of Christ.

Key Words : Anointing, Mary of Bethany, Salvation, Household/Family Imagery, Gospel of John

In the essay that follows I will try to understand a passage of Scripture in light of God’s rescue, through the death of Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son, for those who live bereft of community. Family/household and associated imagery runs throughout the Fourth Gospel, especially its latter half. I would like to explore that insight by considering the significance of the death of Jesus in the Gospel of John. First, I will examine a passage unique to the Fourth Gospel, the mother of Jesus and beloved disciple at the foot of the cross (19:25-27); next, I will look at the anointing episode itself (12:1-7).

John 12:1-7 and “ Narrative Echo ” in the Fourth Gospel

In my doctoral dissertation¹ I argue that from John 12 to the end of John 19 a narrative echo in the text of the Fourth Gospel is developed. The echo comes to the fore in two particular passages, John 13:2-30 and John 19:38-42.² The narrative echo concept is easily explained. Just as a familiar melody is repeated in a musical passage and can seem to “echo” to the listener, so too in biblical narrative, patterns of repetition can be distinguished. It is possible that such repetition aided memory, and as oral traditions were passed down they became ordered according to certain overarching themes that are still manifested today in the written narrative.

Scholars have recently elucidated the anointing

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episode in Fourth Gospel by not only seeing the text in comparison with similar episodes in the Synoptic Gospels, but by understanding the significance of the anointing at Bethany in light of the narrative of the Fourth Gospel as a whole. In so doing, they have moved beyond the conclusions of an earlier era that saw only nonsense in the actions of Mary and considered the content of the passage a corruption from parallel Synoptic texts. Instead, they have highlighted both the prior literary context of the resurrection of Lazarus in John 11 and demonstrated similarities between the anointing and what follows in the narrative which is unique to the Fourth Gospel. Though the narrative echo in John 13 reverberating from the Bethany anointing leads to the inescapable conclusion that Mary of Bethany is presented in the Fourth Gospel as a true disciple of Jesus Christ, the life-giving crucifixion of Jesus, the central event of the Fourth Gospel which the foot washing anticipates, has important ramifications for Jesus' interpretation of Mary's action. What can it mean about the significance of Jesus' death, the climax of the Gospel narrative, that Jesus should interpret Mary's gesture of thanksgiving as foreshadowing his burial preparation? Mary Coloe hints at this significance when she writes, "The fact that they are a household is not incidental to the theology of the narrative."³ My thesis is that from John 12:1-7 two narrative echoes in the narrative of the Fourth Gospel occur: 1) Jesus' washing of the disciples' feet in John 13 and 2) the burial preparation of Jesus, in John 19. The present essay will briefly explore the associations in the passion narrative between the gathering of a new household of God and the death of Jesus and finally investigate the ramifications of Lazarus, Martha, and Mary as a household, considering the implications of this for the saving work of Jesus and the gift of life that his death brings.

John 19:25-27

Though the similarities between John 12:1-7 and two other narratives unique to the Fourth Gospel, John

13:2-30 and 19:38-42, have been noted by others and need not be reexamined here, the relationship between these two narrative echoes of John 12:1-7 with one other has gone unexplored. This is probably because Jesus' washing his disciples' feet and his burial preparation by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus appear to have little to do with one another except that they are both foreshadowed in the narrative of the Fourth Gospel by the circumstances of what occurred in Bethany on a sixth day before the Passover (12:1).

Upon closer examination however, certain features relating these two otherwise dissimilar narratives with one another become apparent: 1) Assuming, as we must, a 24-hour calendar day preceding the Sabbath that began and ended at dusk, the two episodes appear to correspond to the beginning and end of a day in which the death of Jesus is narrated (cf. 13:2-5; 19:31, 42);⁴ and 2) both actions, the washing of the disciples by Jesus and the burial preparation of Jesus by Nicodemus and Joseph involve moments when the household association between Jesus and his disciples is symbolically enacted. Only close family members and those acting in the place of family buried their dead. Burial in a tomb "where no one had ever been laid" would not have been the usual procedure for disposing of a criminal's body. One individual never identified as a disciple (Nicodemus), attends to Jesus' body as if he were a follower, implying that the death of Jesus not only gathers but also draws those outside the circle of Jesus' followers, in.⁵ The foot washing, a customary action of welcome to the household for guests that usually took place before a shared meal, demonstrates the love of Jesus for his own (13:1), a love more fully revealed in the laying down of Jesus' life (15:13). This symbolic action precedes Jesus' own death and resurrection, by which he would prepare a dwelling place for himself and the Father with his disciples (14:2, cf. 23).

It is impossible to know either why the Fourth Gospel contains so much material associated with the death of Jesus not found in the Synoptics or how the Fourth Gospel narrative came to be arranged the way it has. Still, clues surrounding the symbolic household

of Jesus and Jesus’ death/crucifixion may enable us to reach tentative conclusions about the Gospel’s salvation history. It is significant that the foot-washing and the burial preparation of Jesus begin and end a section of narrative that climaxes with the crucifixion of Jesus and his words “It is accomplished” (19:30). Moreover, another short episode closely associated with Jesus’ death and unmistakably connected to the household theme is narrated within the boundaries of John 13:2 and 19:42: Jesus’ words to his mother and beloved disciple by which he entrusts them to one another in his absence (19:25-27). Since this passage is not only unique to the Fourth Gospel but is also closely related to the death of Jesus and the Gospel’s household theme, it seems reasonable to examine it here in order to determine what significance it might have for other narrative in the gospel’s latter half, especially narrative such as the anointing of Jesus in John 12:1-7.

In the past commentators have interpreted the scene at the cross between Jesus, his mother, and the beloved disciple as demonstrating nothing more than the filial obligation of Jesus, but the symbolic potential of the passage is widely recognized today. The range of interpretations for how this symbolism is to be understood depends on several factors: 1) The resemblance of Jesus’ words in John 19:26-27 to an adoption formula,⁶ a last testament,⁷ a revelatory formula,⁸ or some combination of these;⁹ 2) whether the spotlight is ultimately on the mother of Jesus,¹⁰ the beloved disciple,¹¹ or both at the same time;¹² and 3) the proper translation of εἰς τὰ ἴδια in John 19:27.¹³ Underlying all three of these issues is how readers understand the seemingly ordinary aspects of the episode and the manner in which this relates to the Fourth Gospel’s use of symbolism.¹⁴ My goal is not so much to “prove” the superiority of one interpretation over another so much as it is to understand the theological significance of events at the cross in light of the Gospel’s depiction of the gathering and restoring of community through the death of Christ.

Several points are relevant. The circumstances of Jesus’ imminent death indicate that his words in John

19:26-27 are at least in some sense to be recognized as a final “testament.” Because his words are spoken not long before his death they more closely resemble the testament of a dying head of household who transfers the care of the household from himself to another, rather than an adoption formula that emphasizes only a new household relationship. Though the focus is certainly on the beloved disciple receiving the mother of Jesus into his home (19:27), this last testament of Jesus points to a new two-part reality with consequences for both mother and son. By dying, Jesus brings about a new household in which his mother would receive and love the disciple as her own son, and the disciple would receive and care for Jesus’ mother as his own. Though the concern for the future welfare of both mother and disciple reflects a customary duty on the part of sons and teachers for those who would survive them, Jesus’ action is also unexpected, in the case of his mother, because he has already been depicted as having brothers who might have cared for her (cf. 7:2-10). Both mother and disciple are real and distinct people in the narrative, but they are nevertheless unnamed and so also appear to have a representational function. As a result, the theological significance of what unfolds is highlighted in the text. In this death, by which Jesus demonstrates that he has accomplished all that was given to him by the Father to do (τετέλεσται, 19:36), Jesus demonstrates the full extent of his love to those who are his own (εἰς τέλος ἠγάπησεν αὐτούς, 13:1). The risen Jesus later names not his mother, nor the beloved disciple, but all his followers his siblings (20:17; cf. 21:23), saying, “I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God” (20:17).¹⁵ As the Prologue to the Fourth Gospel has already indicated, all followers of Jesus who receive Jesus in faith are given “to become children of God” (1:12). Mother and son are made one, so that others like them might also be one in the resulting household of both the Father and the Son (17:11, 20-24).

If Mary, Martha, and Lazarus become children of the Father through the death of God’s only Son Jesus, we might expect to find indications of a household

relationship with Jesus already in the narrative of the Bethany anointing. After all, the scene at Bethany is the first place Jesus explicitly mentions his own imminent death (12:7-8), and the anointing episode is the origin of the echo narratives we find in 13:2-30 and 19:38-42. We therefore turn to John 12:1-7 to see what implications the restoration and gathering of a new household of God through the death of Jesus might have for understanding the symbolic action of Mary.

John 12:1-7: Context

The context of John 12:1-7 indicates that the anointing of Jesus at Bethany is actually sandwiched between narratives that stress the restoring and gathering of community to Jesus. We will consider the significance of the restored household of Lazarus for the anointing below when we examine John 12:1-7 in greater detail, but the image of gathering a new community is already in evidence before the anointing pericope in John 11:47-52, and follows not long after in John 12:20-32.

John 11:51-52, like John 1:11-13, uses household language to contrast a new community of people from an older or former community. For early Jewish recipients of the Gospel tradition the “scattered children of God” in John 11:52 probably pointed to Jews in the Diaspora,¹⁶ though the use of the phrase in the prologue seems to point beyond this limited association to a more general one for it speaks of “all who received [Jesus]” in faith. The focus in John 11:52 is on a “new Israel,” comprised of both Jews and Gentiles, gathered to the Father by the Son.

Not long after the anointing is narrated and Jesus has entered Jerusalem we are introduced to a group of “Hellenists”¹⁷ who arrive in Jerusalem seeking Jesus simultaneous to the arrival of Jesus’ “hour” (12:23). To describe the gift of life that he is about to grant, Jesus uses three important metaphors. First he compares the life resulting from his immanent death to a single kernel of wheat that “dies” and in doing so “does not remain only one/alone” (12:24). The con-

trast between the one and the many that result from the one who dies is inescapable.¹⁸ He then elaborates on the significance of his “hour” by telling the crowd that the ruler of this world will now be cast out (12:31), and that when he is lifted up from the earth at his death he will draw all people to himself (12:32). Here the “lifting up” clearly refers to the crucifixion of Jesus himself (cf. 12:34).

The image of Jesus gathering a new community of God through his death is thus to be found in the narrative both before and after the anointing of Jesus by Mary at Bethany. We turn next to the anointing episode itself to see how the household metaphor functions to elucidate Jesus’ death.

John 12:1

John 12:1 begins with reference to the setting of the anointing, associating this with the household of Lazarus and with the imminent arrival of the Passover. “Then, on a sixth day before the Passover,¹⁹ Jesus came to Bethany where Lazarus, the man who had died,²⁰ whom Jesus had raised from the dead,²¹ was.” The twofold emphasis involving 1) the resurrection of Lazarus and 2) the week preceding the Jewish sacrifice and consumption of the Passover in Jerusalem (cf. 11:55-57) constitutes an emphasis that would have likely evoked important associations with households for the Gospel’s first-century readers.

Mary, Martha, and Lazarus comprise a single household (cf. 11:1-2), which, according to the prevailing patriarchal and androcentric orientation of the first century among especially Jewish readers, would have been perceived as having Lazarus at its head.²² No mention is made in the text of the siblings’ parents. There is no indication that any of the siblings have children, are married, or cohabit with extended family. In the absence of a father who would have served as head of the household, Lazarus, the sisters’ brother, would have been seen by ordinary first-century readers as serving in this capacity (cf. 1 Macc 2:49-69). Jesus grants life to Lazarus and the household of Mary, Martha and Lazarus, first introduced at

the beginning of John 11, is restored.

Lazarus’s illness and death, however, invite first-century readers to consider his household in a new light. The household changed in the course of the narrative of John 11 in two important ways. 1) The sisters are portrayed in a manner that reflects their status as survivors of the household: they send for Jesus (11:3), meet him outside the village (in Martha’s case, unaccompanied; cf. 11:20-27) and are the focus of the mourners’ attention, being accompanied by them to the tomb of Lazarus (11:32). Their independence from all other characters in the narrative (except Jesus himself) has been noted by modern readers who have observed the Fourth Gospel’s depiction of women in light of the literature of the first-century Mediterranean world.²³ 2) Jesus’ relationship to the sisters, rather than with merely Lazarus himself, is necessarily highlighted in the narrative of John 11. The sisters request Jesus’ aid with the reminder that he is a friend of Lazarus (11:3; cf. 11), but this “friendship” is accompanied by their recognition that he is also both their “master” (11:3, 21, 27, 32, 39) and “teacher” (11:28).²⁴ Jesus’ true relationship to Mary and Martha is elucidated further by the clear indication that he hastens his own arrest and the laying down of his life in travelling to Bethany and performing this sign (11:16, 45-53; 15:13). Jesus restores the household of Lazarus, but his relationship to the Lazarus family will never be the same again.

A second aspect of John 12:1 directly related to the ancient theme of a household has to do with the text’s reference to the imminence of the Passover and to the customs that would have been associated with the celebration of the feast. Two points are important in this regard: 1) Passover was a festival at which households would have gathered for the sake of celebrating the rescue and establishment of the House of Israel, and 2) a sixth day before the Passover (Nisan 10),²⁵ the day upon which the Passover Lamb was known to have been set apart for slaughter by each household of the House of Israel (cf. Exod 12:3), would have served to define the beginning of a week during which households would have gathered at the

Jerusalem temple for rites of self-purification (11:55-57).

Passover was a festival for and about households. The ancient celebration of the feast emphasized the selection of a lamb for individual households (cf. Exod 12:3-4, 27). Documents closer to the period of the first-century found an even greater place for the association between the Passover celebration and the individual household than what can be seen in Deuteronomy.²⁶ At the time of Philo, for example, the restriction of the meal to male adults at the temple was lifted, and the meal was celebrated once again in the midst of individual, Jewish households (*Spec. Laws* 2.148). This focus on the participation of households and the pilgrimage of families to Jerusalem for the Passover is evident also in the New Testament (Luke 2:41-49) and is mentioned by Josephus (*J.W.* 6.423-26). Such an emphasis upon the family context and interest of the feast only would have increased for the Jews after the temple’s demise.²⁷

The gathering of Jewish households for the celebration of the Passover would have begun at the time marked by John 12:1, that is, on “a sixth day before the Passover.” The day would have been important for two reasons: (1) Nisan 10 signaled the beginning of a week-long ritual observance of self-consecration at the temple (cf. 11:55-57) which for some may well have begun prior to Nisan 10, and (2) Nisan 10 had an anticipatory significance for Jewish households preparing themselves for the sacrifice and consumption of the Passover (cf. Exod 12:3).

Nisan 10 defines the beginning of a week-long period that would have included the activity of self-consecration by Jewish pilgrims to Jerusalem. Such purification rituals would have required as much as a seven-day residence in the vicinity of Jerusalem by Jerusalem pilgrims to remove the most severe form of ritual uncleanness: contact with a corpse or tomb accidentally made on the way to Jerusalem.²⁸ While temporary residence in and around Jerusalem with blood relations was not a requirement of the festival, most Jerusalem pilgrims would have been accommodated by family or extended family relations, if living

in the Jerusalem vicinity.

The day had an even greater significance for households arriving as pilgrims to celebrate the Passover in Jerusalem. Specific references to Nisan 10 and to its anticipatory significance for households preparing for the Passover are to be found in Philo, Josephus, and the rabbis.²⁹ General knowledge of the practice among Greek-speaking Jews of the first century can be demonstrated.³⁰ We may assume that the knowledge of Passover customs and the traditional worship practices of first-century Jews would have been reflected in the early worship practice of followers of Christ, especially prior to the destruction of the temple (70 CE), although the precise impact upon early Christian worship is unknown. At the very least it might be said that “a sixth day before the Passover” would have evoked Nisan 10 for Jewish Christian readers of the Fourth Gospel, for this had been the day that Jewish households had set aside and kept a lamb in preparation for its eventual sacrifice and consumption on a subsequent “sixth day.”³¹

John 12:2-3

The actions of the family introduced in John 11 are then depicted in John 12:2-3: “Accordingly, they made a dinner for him there, and Martha was serving, and Lazarus was one of those who were reclining (at table) with him. Then Mary took a (Roman) pound of perfume, of genuine precious spikenard, anointed Jesus’ feet, and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.” Many groups are gathered together in Bethany. Jesus is present with his disciples. The family of Lazarus is present. Even the wider community of Bethany, a village comprised of multiple households, is represented (12:1). Therefore, “they” in v. 2 recalls not only the family of Lazarus but every other family of Bethany in attendance.³² Not just Lazarus and his sisters but a greater “house of the poor”³³ hosts the meal prepared for Jesus and is said to have made the meal for him (12:2).

Several aspects of the setting, though they might

not suggest a single household, nevertheless indicate more than an ordinary gathering of guests for a formal dinner: (1) No head of the household is mentioned; but Jesus is clearly the focus of the gathering, for the dinner is served in his honor and his role is contrasted from that of all other participants who would have prepared, served, or reclined at table. (2) The presence of Martha and Mary, together with the imminent Passover, suggests that the meal would have had the intimacy of a family gathering rather than the formal air of a banquet or symposium at which men and women could have been more strictly segregated.³⁴ Both the “reclining at table” and the circumstances of Jesus’ prior visit to Bethany (11:17-44) indicate that this *δείπνον* would have been a celebratory or festive dinner.³⁵ (3) Through the meal, existing relationships between individuals would have been strengthened. A shared meal would have been understood by the peoples of the first-century Mediterranean world as a sign of mutual fellowship, acceptance, and community reflecting a common bond akin to the attachment between members of a family.³⁶

Foot service was a customary activity in the first-century households of Jesus’ day. Mary’s application of perfume to Jesus’ feet should first be understood in the context of what was customary for people performing foot service upon others in the first-century Mediterranean world.³⁷ In preparation for a household meal, foot service among the peoples of the first century was quite expected and consisted in either guests washing their own feet (with water provided by the host), or a slave performing the task after the guests’ entrance to the house and prior to the meal (cf. Luke 7:44). Occasionally the foot washing was followed by the application of aromatic oil.³⁸ On rare occasions, foot washing might have been undertaken “by a loved one” of the household, but these would have been “in cases of deep love or extreme devotion.”³⁹ Though this attention to feet would have simply been a matter of good hygiene, in the domestic setting it was customarily a courtesy provided by a host so as to welcome a guest to the fellowship of the

household.

Mary's act also *deviates* from the more customary in several important respects: (1) Mary's is not a foot washing, but a foot anointing, carried out not before but either during or after the meal had been eaten (12:2-3);⁴⁰ (2) Mary uses a full Roman pound of perfume on Jesus' feet, much more than ever would have been ordinarily used for practical purposes following a foot washing;⁴¹ and (3) Mary wipes off the perfume with her hair, despite the fact that even the public loosing of a woman's hair, let alone the use of it for wiping perfume from a man's feet, could have been an action considered self-abasing for a Jewish woman of the first century. Such anomalies suggest that the anointing is to be understood symbolically, as an extraordinary action which signifies something beyond the practical, everyday significance of an ordinary foot anointing.

The Gospel narrates first a foot anointing that is out of the ordinary because it occurs independent of a foot washing. The customary matter of washing a guest's feet before the meal has presumably already occurred (cf. Luke 7:44), and the anointing takes place once the guests are reclining at table and the meal has already begun.⁴² What would such an anointing have indicated? The prospect of a woman applying aromatic oil to the feet of a man already reclining at table could have been strongly suggestive of a romantic encounter.⁴³ It could also have demonstrated Mary's fervent devotion to one who has already been welcomed by the household as guest of honor.⁴⁴ Context suggests the latter, and the reader assumes for the moment that Mary's devotion proceeds out of thanksgiving for what Jesus has done in restoring her brother.

The second extraordinary feature of the anointing is the amount and quality of the perfume used. A Roman pound (λίτρα) would have been much more than what was needed for the task of anointing one person in the customary manner. Spikenard,⁴⁵ which originated in India and was imported to Mesopotamia, would have been a precious commodity. A first-century reader would not have been surprised by

Judas's reaction to Mary's use of the perfume. The value of the perfume, 300 denarii (12:4), would have been the rough equivalent of a year's wages for an average day laborer in Jesus' day. Together, both the quality and quantity of the perfume constitute an astonishing financial expense on the part of Mary's household, and Mary's disposal of this property implies an extraordinary sufficiency.⁴⁶ The circumstances of the encounter together with the first-century custom of dowry exchange have led some to conclude that first-century readers would have likely perceived Mary to be presenting herself as fictive bride of Jesus or mistress of his household.⁴⁷ Whether or not this is the case, Mary does attend to Jesus as more than just an honored guest of the gathering and the prodigality of her gift implies a measure of independent action and voluntary self-sacrifice.

A final extraordinary feature of the anointing comes with what Mary does once she has applied the perfume to Jesus' feet: she wipes it off with her hair. Both Mary's action of wiping the perfume from Jesus' feet, as well as the use of her hair, indicated that she is behaving like a servant or slave, although the reader knows her to be neither.

Precisely how the image of Mary anointing Jesus' feet and wiping his feet with her hair is to be understood is a matter of dispute. Some commentators try to make sense of the wiping by understanding it outside a focus on the text's socio-historical context.⁴⁸ Others seek to understand Mary's action in light of its likely significance for the Gospel's first-century readers, shifting their focus away from the reason for Mary's wiping off the perfume to how her behavior would have likely been received and understood, yet they focus exclusively on the somewhat ambiguous image of Mary's loosened hair. Loosened hair, that is, either the unbinding of a woman's braided hair or removal of her veil, could have either signified that a woman was young and unmarried or that she was mourning the death of a loved one. In unambiguous ritual contexts, a woman's unbound hair could also indicate devotion, humility, and thankful veneration to a deity.⁴⁹ Each of these interpretations highlights

various important aspects of the narrative: Mary certainly appears to be unmarried, her behavior will later be associated by Jesus with his own burial preparation, and the reader, who knows Jesus to be God (cf. 1:1, 18), would understand if her gesture would be more fitting for a god than an ordinary man. The problem with each of these interpretations, however, is that they address neither the socio-historical significance of Mary's *wiping* Jesus' feet with her hair or the specific circumstances for the anointing that are detailed in the text.

The significance of wiping with one's hair and the circumstances of the anointing suggest that Mary, though she is clearly neither a slave nor a prostitute, nevertheless presents herself to Jesus in a manner befitting a slave and thus in a manner that would have ordinarily been self-abasing for a woman of the first century. A woman of the first century might have had unbound hair for any variety of reasons. But a woman with unbound hair who is not only in the company of men reclining at table, but even uses that hair to wipe off perfume that she has just applied to one man's feet, no matter how informal the gathering, suggests she is intentionally behaving in a manner that resembles the conduct of a servant or slave.⁵⁰ In this respect her behavior anticipates the similarly self-effacing manner of Jesus, who, though teacher and master, girds himself as a slave with a foot-washer's towel (13:4). So in the specific context of the Fourth Gospel, Mary is readily identifiable as one who presents herself in abject humility. That no other guest is similarly anointed indicates at the very least that Jesus is being singled out as a guest of honor. Both the giving of the perfume itself and the manner in which it is given suggest different types of household relationships with Jesus, but both actions are motivated by the same life-giving work of Jesus.

Ultimately, we find that Mary's anointing of Jesus is a study in contrasts. Mary appears simultaneously rich and poor, both blessed and impoverished. She displays a startling sense of confidence befitting a mistress of the household even as her veneration of Jesus displays self-effacing and humble devotion to

her Lord. The images of wealthy patron and humble servant of Jesus are held together in tension. But one thing is clear: by her actions, Mary has offered herself to Jesus. She now leaves it up to him to determine the nature of her resulting relationship, either with him or his household. Though Mary has presented/offered herself to Jesus in a manner that invites more than one specific household relationship, we read on to discover what, if any validation of such relationships the text holds in store.

John 12:4-7

The evangelist next turns to John 12:4-7 in order to further develop the household theme. Jesus' last word on the significance of the anointing is contained in John 12:7, and in so doing, it offers a final and definitive interpretation of Mary's action that indicates her household relationship to him. This response affirms Mary's anointing and demonstrates Judas to be in the wrong: "But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples, the one who was about to betray him, said, 'For what reason was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?' (But he did not say this because the poor mattered to him, rather, [he said this] because he was a thief and, because he had the treasurer's box, he used to pilfer what was put into it.) Jesus said, 'Let her keep it for the day of my burial preparation.'"⁵¹

Jesus' closing words point again to the presence of a household theme in two important aspects: (1) several features of ancient funerary practice as the activity of first-century households would have been evoked both by Jesus' words and by the evangelist's depiction of the anointing; and (2) Mary's membership in a new household of God about to be gathered by Jesus, at his death, would have also been suggested by Jesus' manner of embracing her unwitting participation in his burial preparation.

Several features of the anointing, while appropriate for a household's observance of the Passover connect also with customs that would have surrounded its mourning rituals: (1) Mary's application of aromatic

oil to the feet of Jesus recalls the burial preparation undertaken by households in Jesus’ day; (2) the setting of an evening meal parallels that of the funerary banquet of a household; (3) Mary’s loosened hair is appropriate for a woman who is grieving the loss of a close family member; and (4) the offering of perfume or other aromatic substance by members of a household is a tribute to the deceased common in the first-century Mediterranean world. Each of these features will now be considered in turn.

Burial preparation in Jesus’ day consisted first in washing the body of the deceased with water and anointing it with perfume, a task undertaken either by the family of the deceased or by those acting in the capacity of family.⁵² After the first century, the rabbis prescribed a laying out of the body at home, washing it and anointing it once with oil, and then rinsing it with a bath. A second anointing was then performed in order to perfume the body. A focus upon burial preparation as a household custom for the people of ancient Palestine is evident throughout the Old Testament (e.g., Gen 25:9; 35:29; 49:29-33; 50:1-26; Judg 16:31; Amos 6:10) and the same holds true for Jewish literature of the first century CE.⁵³ It is mentioned frequently in the Greco-Roman literature of the first century as well.⁵⁴ Burial preparation either began immediately at the place of death or in the home.

Funeral preparation in the context of a meal would have also recalled the funerary banquet, a feast at which the unity of the surviving family was preserved and the deceased remembered. These meals, depending on the context, were observed by the family of the deceased either at the tomb at the time of interment, immediately following the funeral at the home of the immediate family, or on anniversary or festival days at which time the death of the family member would have been remembered.⁵⁵ Jesus’ interpretation of Mary’s anointing as a funeral anointing changes the atmosphere of the supper from a predominantly joyous celebration of Lazarus’ resurrection to a sober foreshadowing of Jesus’ own death. The nature of the meal for a first-century reader

is such that in both instances Mary is depicted as an intimate member of Jesus’ family. Funerary meals offered the surviving members of a household a chance to honor their dead and receive mutual encouragement from one another in the face of their loss. With a focus on the meal as funerary banquet Mary’s action still reflects the loving devotion that she offers her Lord, only now she venerates him in thanksgiving for all he has done, for he has “died.” Receiving a meal together the community is still bound together in table fellowship, only now it receives mutual encouragement and strength, for members of the household are no longer with them as they had been before (cf. 12:8).

Jesus’ interpretation of Mary’s action depicts Mary as a person belonging to his household by referencing her loosened hair. A woman’s loosened hair was no immediate indication of a lack of propriety. In certain contexts it would have indicated that she was grieving the loss of a beloved member of her household.⁵⁶ Highlighted, then, is Mary’s personal relationship to Jesus. Though she has offered herself to Jesus in a manner that resembles the conduct of a slave, Jesus receives her and those present with her as if they were family preparing his body for burial.

The perfume used in the anointing would have called to mind the gathering of a household, because perfume was a tribute to the deceased common to the households of the first-century. In ancient Greece, aromatic offerings were customarily given as grave gifts.⁵⁷ A similar custom likely prevailed throughout Palestine. In the vicinity of Bethany especially, alabaster jars that may have contained aromatic oil have been discovered in tombs through archeological excavation.⁵⁸ Elsewhere, in the Roman context of cremation, aromatic oil was customarily added to the funeral pyre as an offering on behalf of the deceased.⁵⁹ Not only was perfume applied as a part of the process of burial preparation, perfume was poured out and spices scattered both at the tomb and upon the funeral pyre by members of the household. The image of the fragrance-filled house would have comported well not only with a household feast of joyous celebration, but

also with a household engaged in mourning rituals on behalf of a deceased loved one.

Several features of ancient funerary practice as the activity of a first-century household would have been evoked both by Jesus' words and by the evangelist's depiction of the anointing. Mary, while offering Jesus thanks, at the same time also prepares his body for burial. His is a household that simultaneously celebrates life as it unwittingly prepares for his impending death.

John 12:3-6 implies that all of the perfume was expended on Jesus and that nothing would have been left to be preserved for a later time. Jesus' words in John 12:7 can therefore hardly mean that Judas should allow Mary to keep some of the perfume for another day. Rather, Mary's manner of observing the moment anticipates another burial preparation. Jesus' response to Judas highlights the action of Mary as one of his own. Jesus' interpretation of the anointing dissolves the force of Judas's rebuke and resolves the competing bride/slave imagery in the mind of the reader. Jesus embraces Mary as his kinswoman. She has performed his preparation for burial unawares. He has welcomed this and her role in it.

Conclusion

From the opening verses of John 12:1-7 several households are in evidence. The first household referenced in the text is the household of Lazarus, Martha, and Mary. Their household is restored by Jesus (12:1), the cause for celebration at the return of Jesus to Bethany. The Passover context insures that not only the family of Lazarus, but other households (of Jesus [12:1], the families of Bethany who are present [12:2]) are gathered as well. The events as they are narrated occur on a sixth day before that festival, the day that individual households of Israel used to gather to select the Passover lamb.

But even though several households are evident from the outset of this passage, other features of the passage immediately emphasize the oneness of the community that is present. The Bethany community,

together with the household of Lazarus, collaborates to prepare a meal for Jesus (12:1). Then they recline at table to eat a meal together. Lazarus and Martha, two individuals whom the reader is not inclined to associate with the household of Jesus, are depicted in close association with him: Martha serves and Lazarus reclines at table with Jesus. No single household head, and so no head of the household, is singled out. But Jesus is clearly the guest of honor and so occupies the primary position of importance in the narrative.

Mary's anointing, because it is performed in a manner that is contrary to convention, is understood by the reader to be symbolic. It is here that the lines separating the household of Jesus and the household of Lazarus begin to blur. Though it is not clear at first exactly what the anointing is intended to signify, the quality and quantity of the perfume indicate a treasure of great value, suggesting that Mary is mistress of her own household affairs and boldly offers herself to Jesus. At the same time, the manner of the anointing is so self-effacing as to suggest that Mary is not a kinswoman of Jesus at all, but rather a servant, even a slave of Jesus, who venerates him out of an abject humility. The two images exist side by side in the reader's mind, and the resulting tension cries out for resolution which does not come until the end of the pericope, with the words of Jesus in John 12:7.

Jesus has the last word on the anointing, and considering the Passover context of the pericope, this constitutes the most important part of the passage. Jesus associates the anointing with his own burial preparation, and as he does so, he declares Mary to be his own kinswoman, a member of his household (12:7). Though her lavish gift to Jesus is one that is made in an extraordinarily self-effacing manner, Jesus compares it to the loving act of an intimate household member, and in so doing, elevates Mary and points to her action as the epitome of faithful discipleship. By association, those who are members of the household to which Mary belongs are now all associated with Jesus' household. That these events take place on what would have traditionally been understood to be Nisan 10 means that they coincided

with the selection of the Passover lamb by members of the household of Jesus. The progression in status from "slave" to kinswoman of Jesus in the text of John 12:3-7 anticipates the new household of God that Jesus would gather through his death and parallels the Old Testament "household of Israel" released from the "house of bondage" in Egypt through the Exodus event.

What can it mean about the significance of Jesus' death, the climax of the Gospel narrative, that Jesus should interpret Mary's gesture of thanksgiving as foreshadowing his burial preparation? In claiming Mary as his kinswoman at Bethany and anticipating his own death, Jesus set the stage for the day that Mary will be more than a kinswoman, but a sister (cf. 19:25-27; 20:17). Israel celebrated the Passover and was brought out of the house of bondage to a new household relationship with God. At Bethany Mary and her household anticipate the eating of the Passover, their receiving of the lamb of God, and the new community that God would make of them. No longer merely brother and sister of one another, they will then become children of God and brother and sisters of the Son of God.

The remainder of the Fourth Gospel describes Jesus as one who, by dying and rising, will complete and gather a new community of God. Though Jesus' death as cleansing from sin is hinted at and developed more fully elsewhere in the Johannine corpus (1 John 1:7, cf. 9; 2:2, 4:10) his death as saving because it gathers a new community is highlighted most consistently in the Fourth Gospel. In this Gospel, God saves by gathering. Far from being a text that merely reflects unintelligible corruption from parallel Synoptic accounts of a similar anointing episode, John 12:1-7 reflects the unique interests of this Gospel's passion narrative. It is carefully structured so as to depict a community gathered to Jesus, and so gathered also to the Father, so as to live as brothers and sisters and as disciples of Christ.

Though the word "church" may not appear anywhere in all of the Fourth Gospel, this Gospel understands the church to be the new household of

God, gathered by Jesus through his death, a community of men and women, disciples and followers, brothers and sisters, with God the Father and the Father's Son Jesus, at its head. Those who love Jesus as Jesus' own are, in response to his gift of life, to love one another (15:12). This is not only how the Father has dealt with Jesus (15:9); it is how Jesus, the Lord of the Church, has dealt with his own (13:1; 15:12-13). Though the church is always a plurality, and so a community of people with a variety of gifts and individual abilities (cf. 1 Cor. 12: 12-31), love of brother and sister is the closest that the people of God, first century or otherwise, can come to imitating the foot service of Jesus and the love of his own that he first gave "to the utmost/end" (13:1). In an age when both church organizations as well as individual congregations⁶⁰ are too often plagued by infighting and controversy, and when, paradoxically, people yearn for community more than ever before, the message of the Fourth Gospel has become all the more timely.

But we can go still farther in applying this passage to our own local context. For people who live alone in a modern urban environment or in a rapidly aging society in search of someone to care for them, the message of this Gospel is especially significant. There is an English expression: "crowded loneliness." "Crowded loneliness" refers to the peculiarly urban circumstance of being surrounded by people, but having few with whom one can achieve a real sense of emotional connection. Loneliness and disconnectedness is an issue for people of every country and every generation. According to the household imagery of the Fourth Gospel, when Jesus gave up his life on the cross, a new community comes into being. People of the first century who were excluded from society or those who lost the only community they had ever known were nevertheless gathered to God and to one another within the early Christian community. The same can be said for people today. According to the Fourth Gospel, this community owes its existence to the death of Jesus, and by his death, to the cross. Through Jesus and the testimony of his life-giving

death by the evangelist, modern readers, even those who find themselves otherwise bereft, have gained a family. They have both a place and a community with one another and with God in which to dwell forever.

Notes

- 1 Jonathan A. Blanke, "A Household to Be Gathered: The Anointing at Bethany and the Day of Jesus' Death in the Gospel according to John" (Ph.D. diss., Concordia Seminary Graduate School, 2007).
- 2 The term "narrative echo" was first applied to the Acts of the Apostles in comparison with Luke by Robert Tannehill. Cf. "The Composition of Acts 3-5: Narrative Development and Echo Effect," *SBL Seminar Papers* 1984 (SBLSP 21; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1984), 237-40. It was later applied to the Good Shepherd discourse and the passion narrative of John by Mark Stibbe. See Stibbe's *John as Storyteller: Narrative Criticism and the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 29, 102-5; cf. R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia, Fortress, 1983), 73-75, 88-89; David R. Beck, *The Discipleship Paradigm: Readers and Anonymous Characters in the Fourth Gospel* (BibInt 27; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 51-53.
- 3 Mary L. Coloe, "Anointing the Household of God," in *Dwelling in the Household of God: Johannine Ecclesiology and Spirituality* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2007), 120.
- 4 Regarding the accounting of a cultic day in first-century Palestine, see Julian Morgenstern, "Supplementary Studies in the Calendars of Ancient Israel," *HUCA* 10 (1935): 15; S. Safrai, *Jewish People of the First Century: Historical Geography, Political History, Social, Cultural, Religious Life and Institutions* (ed. S. Safrai and M. Stern; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 2:861-62; Gale Yee, *Jewish Feasts and the Gospel of John* (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1989), 28; William Propp, *Exodus 1-18* (AB 2; ed. W. F. Albright and D. N. Freedman; New York: Doubleday, 1999), 389-406; R. Alan Culpepper, *The Gospel and Letters of John* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 199; Jack Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology: Principles of Time Reckoning in the Ancient World and Problems of Chronology in the Bible* (rev. ed.; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1998), 8, 356; and Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (2 vols.; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2003), 1:471. Cf. Joachim Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus* (trans. Norman Perrin; London: SCM Press, 1990), 15-16. While Jews in the

Diaspora tended to follow the civic calendars of cities or nation-states where they resided in order to maintain their day-to-day affairs, religious matters followed a different schedule.

- 5 According to this reading, Nicodemus is understood to be portrayed favorably by the evangelist as a follower of Jesus, though his actions demonstrate that he does not yet fully understand the significance of Jesus' death. Cf. Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John* (2 vols; AB 29; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966-70), 2:959-60; John Painter, *The Quest for the Messiah: The History, Literature and Theology of the Johannine Community* (2d ed.; Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 198-99; and D. Moody Smith, *The Theology of the Gospel of John* (New Testament Theology 4; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 43. Scholars who see Nicodemus in an even more favorable light, as one with a "mature faith," include Margaret M. Beirne, *Women and Men in the Fourth Gospel* (New York: T & T Clark, 2004), 96-99; and Jean-Marie Auwers, "La Nuit de Nicod_me (John 3:2; 19:39) Ou l'Ombre du Langage," *RB* 97 (1990): 493, 500-501.
- 6 Cf. Charles K. Barrett, *The Gospel according to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text* (London: William Clowes & Sons, 1960), 552; and Craig R. Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery, Community* (2d ed.; Philadelphia: Fortress, 2002), 241.
- 7 Brown, *Gospel*, 2:907, seems to favor understanding the words of Jesus as a "direct commission" or "charge." Cf. Ethelbert Stauffer, *Jesus and His Story* (London: SCM Press, 1960), 133; Rudolph Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to St. John* (ed. Serafin de Aulsejo et al.; trans. Kevin Smyth et al.; 3 vols.; HTKNT 4; New York: Seabury, 1968-82), 3:278; A. H. Maynard, "The Role of Peter in the Fourth Gospel," *NTS* 30 (1984): 539; George R. Beasley-Murray, *John* (WBC 36; Waco: Word Books, 1987), 349; and Herman Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary* (trans. John Vriend; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1997), 614.
- 8 Cf. Raymond F. Collins, "The Representative Figures of the Fourth Gospel-II," *DRev* 94 (1976): 121; John Rena, "Women in the Gospel of John," *EgT* 17 (1986): 135; and Paul Minear, *John, the Martyr's Gospel* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1984), 144-45.
- 9 Anton Dauer, "Das Wort des Gekreuzigten an seine Mutter und den 'Jünger den er liebte' : Eine traditions-geschichtliche und theologische Untersuchung zu Joh 19:25-27," *BZ* 12 (1968): 80-81, refers to the form in question as a "revelation" (*Offenbarung*) that contains an adoption formula. Cf. Brown, *Death*, 2:1021, and Beirne,

- Women and Men*, 179-80. Culpepper, *Gospel and Letters*, 233, utilizes the terminology of speech-act theory to describe a similar phenomenon: “At the cross, when Jesus’ hour has come, Jesus employs a revelatory formula (‘Behold’) and performative language. Like a marriage declaration, his pronouncement actually accomplishes or effects the new relationship that it declares.” Cf. Dorothy Lee, *Flesh and Glory: Symbol, Gender, and Theology in the Gospel of John* (New York, Crossroad, 2002), 154 and Barrett, *Gospel*, 552. Stibbe, *John as Storyteller*, 152-53, concludes that Jesus’ words create the effect of a final testament, which the evangelist wants the reader to understand as a “metaphor for spiritual adoption.”
- 10 See Brown, *Gospel*, 2:923-26; Schnackenburg, *Gospel*, 3:277-79; J. Grassi, “The Role of Jesus’ Mother in John’s Gospel: A Reappraisal,” *CBQ* 48 (1986): 73; Lee, *Flesh*, 152-57.
- 11 Dauer, “Das Wort,” 81; Bruce G. Schuchard, *Scripture within Scripture: The Interrelationship of Form and Function in the Explicit Old Testament Citations in the Gospel of John* (SBLDS 133; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 131 n. 30; José Antonio Caballero, “El Discípulo Amado en el Evangelio de Juan,” *EstBib* 60 (2002): 330.
- 12 See especially Beirne, *Men and Women*, 170-94. Ben Witherington, *Women in the Ministry of Jesus: A Study of Jesus’ Attitudes to Women and Their Roles as Reflected in His Earthly Life* (SNTSMS 51; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 96-97. Cf. Koester, *Symbolism*, 243.
- 13 For an emphasis on as referring to the belongings of the beloved disciple, see especially J. Duncan M. Derrett, *The Victim: The Johannine Passion Narrative Reexamined* (Shipston-on-Stour, Warwickshire, Eng.: Drinkwater, 1993), 32; Ignace de la Potterie, *La passion de Jésus selon l’évangile de Jean* (Lire la Bible 73; Paris: Cerf, 1986), 163, cited by F. Neirynck, “Short Note on John 19:26-27,” *ETL* 71 (1995): 431 n. 8; Schnackenburg, *Gospel*, 3:279; and Caballero, “El Discípulo Amado,” 330. Scholars who specifically emphasize ἡδία as the “home” of the beloved disciple include J. H. Bernard, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. John* (ed. A. H. McNeile; 2 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1929), 2:367; Dauer, “Das Wort,” 85; and F. Neirynck, “ΕΙΣ ΤΑ ΙΔΙΑ: Jn 19:27 (et 16:32),” *ETL* 54 (1979), 365.
- 14 Brown, *Gospel*, 2:923, identifies both a “non-theological” and “deeper” meaning in the episode, but favors the latter. See also Lee, *Flesh*, 152-57. Koester, *Symbolism*, 239-44, individually considers the mother of Jesus and the beloved disciple as unique persons before considering their representative function (pp. 241-42). He ultimately concludes that their significance in John 19:25-27 does not ultimately lie in aspects of their unique identities, but rather that it is “in their relationship with one another that they represent the church” (p. 243).
- 15 The conclusion is widely recognized. See Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 134; Bruce G. Schuchard, “The Wedding Feast at Cana and the Christological Monomania of St. John,” in *All Theology Is Christology: Essays in Honor of David P. Scaer* (ed. Dean O. Wenthe, et al.; Fort Wayne, Ind.: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 2000), 104; Lee, *Flesh*, 154-55; and Beirne, *Women and Men*, 194.
- 16 Cf. John A. Dennis, *Jesus’ Death and the Gathering of True Israel* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006).
- 17 Though the possibility that the term refers to Hellenistic Jews should probably not be ruled out entirely, the more likely referent of the expression is probably Gentile proselytes who had come to Jerusalem to worship at the Passover. Cf. John 7:35; BDAG, s.v. “Ἕλλην, 2.
- 18 Charles H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 369-70 actually sees in the metaphor of the buried seed a symbolic representation of the burial of Jesus, and so a thematic link between the anointing pericope and the discourse that follows it.
- 19 Regarding the unusual phrase Πρὸ ἑξ ἡμερῶν τοῦ πάσχα, consult BDAG, s.v. ἡμέρα, 2.c; Stanley Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament* (2d ed.; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1999), 171; and BDF, 114 (§ 213). Rudolph Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971), 404, translates “six days before the Passover,” yet allows the possibility that the evangelist is counting inclusively. For a discussion of the issue in connection with early Jewish chronologies, see Finegan, *Biblical Chronology*, 78. 96 reads “five” (πέντε), which was later corrected by a scribe who placed superior dots over the πέν-, and, having scraped out the -τε then wrote in “six” (ἕξ). For a description of the manuscript, see Gordon Fee, *Papyrus Bodmer II (P66): Its Textual Relationships and Scribal Characteristics* (SD 34; Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1968), 59. The exact number of days before the Passover, and so the precise day of the month of Nisan, appears to be the issue. The reference in this papyrus to Jesus’ arrival five days before the Passover can be explained by a scribe attempting to be faithful to readers who might have been unfamiliar with an inclusive reckoning of days. Similar scribal changes are in evidence elsewhere in John (e.g., 20:26, where sy^a where reads “on the first day of another week,” instead of “after eight days”). Those who understand the evangelist’s chronology of John 12:1 according to an in-

- clusive reckoning of the days include J. N. Sanders and B. A. Mastin, *A Commentary on the Gospel of St. John* (BNTC 4; London: Adam & Charles Black, 1968), 283; Frédéric Godet, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John* (3 vols.; trans. M. D. Cusin; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1892-1912), 3:48; and Schuchard, "Wedding Feast," 104.
- 20 For a detailed treatment of the issues surrounding either the retention or omission of the reading ὁ τεθνηκώς, see Anton Dauer, *Johannes und Lukas: Untersuchungen zu den johanneisch-lukanischen Parallelperikopen Joh 4.46-5/Lk 7.1-10-Joh 12.1-8/Lk 7.36-50; 10.38-42-Joh 20.19-29/Lk 24.36-49* (FB 50; Würzburg: Echter, 1984), 153 n. 196. Vogels includes the longer reading in his *Novum Testamentum Graece et Latine*; von Soden brackets it in his *Die Schriften des Neuen Testaments* (see NA²⁷, 758). Though the longer reading may have been a gloss inserted by a scribe (cf. 11:21, 39, 41; contrast 19:33), it is more likely that ὁ τεθνηκώς would have been omitted from the passage at a later time, due to the explanatory nature of οὐ ἤγειρεν ἐκ νεκρῶν Ἰησοῦς. The majority of commentaries read with the text of NA²⁷, but few, if any, defend this decision. In addition to Dauer, contrast Godet, *Commentary*, 3:51; and Robert Fortna, *The Gospel of Signs: A Reconstruction of the Narrative Source Underlying the Fourth Gospel* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 149-50. The present essay argues in favor of retaining the reading.
- 21 Cf. the evangelist's threefold manner of describing his characters: John the Baptist (1:6), Nicodemus (3:1), Judas (12:4), and Thomas (20:24).
- 22 This is the case whether or not Lazarus, Mary, and Martha resemble a celibate Essene community as suggested by Timothy Ling, *The Judean Poor and the Fourth Gospel* (SNTMS 136; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 177, 194. So as to emphasize Lazarus, Mary, and Martha as people embedded within a family structure, the evangelist repeatedly mentions their sibling relationships (11:1, 2, 3, 5, 19, 21, 23, 32) even when such specification appears redundant (11:28, 39).
- 23 Representative of those who understand the passage to be portraying women in a positive manner that defies the prevailing convention of the day is Colleen M. Conway, *Men and Women in the Fourth Gospel: Gender and Johannine Characterization* (SBLDS 167; Atlanta: Scholar's Press, 1999), 136. Contrast Adeline Fehribach, *The Women in the Life of the Bridegroom: A Feminist-Historical Literary Analysis of the Female Characters in the Fourth Gospel* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1998), 20, who sees the Gospel as exploiting first-century social conventions in its depiction of women so as to communicate a theological message.
- 24 Such would have been the title used by disciples of their leader. See Satoko Yamaguchi, *Mary & Martha: Women in the World of Jesus* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002), 120.
- 25 The present essay will refer to Jewish festival days (Passover, Sabbath observance, etc.) according to a chronology in which the day is understood to begin and end at dusk, following the Jewish custom of the late first century CE. The month of Nisan, the time when Passover was observed, is referenced repeatedly in the Old Testament and elsewhere as the first month of the year (Esth 3:7; Josephus, Ant. 3.248; cf. Exod 12:1). Regarding its association with March and April, see Jeremiah Unterman and Paul J. Achtemeier, "Time," *HBD* 1152.
- 26 See, e.g., Deut 16:7, which prescribes not only the slaughter but also the consuming of the Passover sacrifice within the sanctuary. Regarding the removal of the restriction of the ceremony to adult males and the enlargement of the sanctuary to the city of Jerusalem, see J. B. Segal, *The Hebrew Passover: From the Earliest Times to AD 70* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 240.
- 27 Regarding the status of the Passover as a "family meal," especially after the destruction of the temple, see Paul Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship: Sources and Methods for the Study of Early Liturgy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 65.
- 28 Josephus (*J.W.* 6.290) affirms that the directive for Jerusalem pilgrims to arrive in the city one week ahead of time for ritual cleansing was practiced by festival-goers in the second-temple period of the first-century.
- 29 For the reference to Philo, see Segal, *Hebrew Passover*, 31. See also Josephus, Ant. 2.311.
- 30 See, e.g., the work of the dramatist Ezekielos, cited by Segal, *Hebrew Passover*, 24.
- 31 Those who understand "a sixth day before the Passover" in John 12:1 as a reference to Nisan 10 include Hilgenfeld and Bauer, as cited by Godet, *Commentary*, 3:49; Benjamin Wisner Bacon, *The Fourth Gospel in Research and Debate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1918), 420-21; M. Weise, "Passionswoche und Epiphaniawoche im Johannes-Evangelium: Ihre Bedeutung für Komposition und Konzeption des Vierten Evangeliums," *KD* 12 (1966): 51-53; Bruce G. Schuchard, *Scripture within Scripture*, 137; and Charles Talbert, *Reading John: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Fourth Gospel and the Johannine Epistles* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1992), 183. Stanley Porter, "Can Traditional Exegesis Enlighten Literary Analysis of the Fourth Gospel? An Examination of the Old Testament Fulfillment Motif and

- the Passover Theme," in *The Gospels and the Scriptures of Israel* (ed. C. A. Evans and W. R. Stegner; JSNTSup 104; Sheffield, Eng.: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 416, writes: "The author makes sure that the reader understands Jesus' anointing as following on from Caiaphas's words and in anticipation of Jesus' death in Jerusalem. . . . Thus Jesus is further depicted as the Passover victim being prepared for sacrifice."
- 32 Use of the indefinite plural here encourages the reader to associate the preparing of the feast with the Bethany community in John 12:1. Though many understand the location of the anointing in John 12:1-7 to be the home of Lazarus' family (see especially Josef Blank, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* (4 vols.; Geistliche Schriftlesung 1a-3; Düsseldorf: Patmos Verlag, 1977-1981), 1/2:291), others, such as Ridderbos, *Gospel*, 414; and Sanders and Mastin, *Commentary*, 283, note that nothing in the text explicitly identifies the house where the gathering takes place.
- 33 The name of the family's hometown ("Bethany," or "House of the Poor," 12:1) indicates a household for those who would be otherwise bereft of household and so without financial or social means. Otto Betz, "Jesus and the Temple Scroll" in *Jesus and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (ed. James H. Charlesworth; New York: Doubleday, 1992), 77-78, considers the possibility that Bethany was a place of quarantine for lepers and other social outcasts who were unable to live within the city of Jerusalem. Bethany was east of Jerusalem, a location identical to the place of quarantine for the poor and unclean as prescribed by the Temple Scroll (11QT^a XLVIII, 14-15). For the first readers of the Fourth Gospel, "the poor" (12:5-6) would not only have been members of a social class, but would have encompassed those who suffered from any misfortune that required God's rescue, whether physical, financial, or social (cf. Matt 5:3; 11:5; 19:16-30; Mark 10:17-31; Luke 4:18-21; 6:20; 7:22; 14:15-24; 18:18-30). Even though the sisters do not seem to suffer from financial poverty at the time of their brother's death, without their brother Lazarus theirs would have been a household impoverished, the embodiment of those who were πτωχοί. Cf. BDAG, s.v., πτωχός; Ernst Bammel, "πτωχός," *TDNT* 6:892-97, 901. See also 1QH^a VI, 3-6 and 1QM XIV, 7.
- 34 Whether or not married Jewish men and women would have customarily reclined together to receive the Passover meal in the first century is a contested issue and probably not possible to resolve. For an overview of the problem, see Kathleen E. Corley, *Private Women/Public Meals: Social Conflict in the Synoptic Tradition* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1993), 68. Some have concluded from a more exclusive study of later, third-century rabbinical texts that Jewish women were strictly segregated from meals at which men were present (e.g., Leonard Swidler, *Women in Judaism. The Status of Women in Formative Judaism* [Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1976], 125; and Leonie Archer, "The Role of Jewish Women in the Religion, Ritual and Cult of Greco-Roman Palestine," in *Images of Women in Antiquity* [ed. Cameron and Kuhrt; rev. ed.; London: Routledge, 1993], 273-87). But the Jewish custom of including women and children at family gatherings such as the Passover meal, especially in the first century, is emphasized by Carolyn Osiek and David L. Balch, *Families in the New Testament World: Households and Household Churches* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 60 and Corley, *Private Women*, 69-71.
- 35 See also John 13:2-4, 30. Regarding the evening setting of the δείπνον elsewhere in literature of the period, see especially Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, eds., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains* (2d ed.; 2 vols.; New York: United Bible Societies, 1988), 1:252; and D. E. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Christian World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 21-22.
- 36 Cf. Smith *Symposium*, 10; and Bruce Malina and Richard Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 207-8; and Bruce Malina, "Mediterranean Sacrifice: Dimensions of Domestic and Political Religion," *BTB* 26 (1996): 28.
- 37 The present essay will not attempt to interpret the anointing in John 12:3 in the context of either (1) occasions in which aromatic oil or perfume would have been mostly self-applied (cf. 2 Sam 12:20-23; 14:2; Jdt 16:7; Matt 6:17), or (2) similar accounts in other Gospels of an anointing of Jesus' head (Matt 26:7; Mark 14:3). For a reading of John 12:3 that compares Mary's anointing of Jesus to the eschatological self-anointing narrated in LXX Isaiah 25:6-8, see Mohr, *Markus- und Johannespassion: Redaktions- und traditions-geschichtliche Untersuchung der markinischen und johanneischen Passionstradition* (ATANT 70; Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1982), 132-34. Understanding the Bethany anointing in John as a politicized version of an event originally narrated in Mark, in which a woman anoints Jesus head, and so seems to fulfill a sacerdotal role indicative of a women's apostolate in the early church, is Elizabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, xiv. But the similarities between this text and Jesus' washing of his disciples' feet in John 13, noted earlier by Beirne and Lee, argue against the conclusion that John 12:3 merely supplants "a more radical anointing" of Jesus' head in Mark. Cf. Chantal Reynier, "Le

- thème du parfum et l'avènement des figures en Jn 11:55-12:11," *ScEs* 46 (94): 208-9. Yamaguchi, *Mary & Martha*, 123-4, considers the possibility of a politicized version of the anointing in John when read in light of Mark, yet writes "The image of preparation for burial indicates that Jesus acknowledges Mary to be one of the persons closest to him" (123). It is precisely this aspect of the anointing at Bethany in the Fourth Gospel that this essay seeks to understand.
- 38 Regarding the ordinary customs surrounding foot washing in the first century, see John Christopher Thomas, *Footwashing in John Thirteen and the Johannine Community* (JSNTSup 61; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991). Cf. Arland Hultgren, "The Johannine Footwashing (13:1-11) as Symbol of Eschatological Hospitality," *NTS* 28 (1982): 541; and Mary Coloe, "Welcome into the Household of God: The Foot Washing in John 13," *CBQ* 66 (2004): 407-8, 411-15
- 39 Thomas, *Footwashing*, 42.
- 40 This is in distinction from the customary washing and occasional anointing of feet before the meal. The use of the imperfect in John 12:2 indicates that the meal was already underway when the anointing takes place.
- 41 A Roman pound would have equaled approximately 12 ounces, or 327.45 grams. John's usual method of indicating amounts or measurement is by introducing the number of pounds, hours, stadia, etc. with the comparative particle ὥς (compare, e.g., 1:39; 6:10, 19; 11:18; 19:14, 39; 21:8). That λίτραν here is the object of the verb and the head noun of what follows suggests that λίτραν is of special significance or emphasis.
- 42 Evidence that a foot anointing with perfume in the midst of a meal would have been contrary to convention can be found in Petronius, *Satyricon*, 70. Scholars of the Fourth Gospel who have noted the unique significance of an anointing that occurs independently of a washing in of John include Bultmann, John, 415; Herold Weiss, "Foot Washing in the Johannine Community," *NovT* 21 (1979): 313-14; and Maurits Sabbe, "The Footwashing of Jn 13 and Its Relation to the Synoptic Gospels," *ETL* 58 (1982): 299.
- 43 Cf. Athenaeus, *Deipnosophists*, 12.78 and Corley, *Private Women*, 78.
- 44 See, e.g., Homer, *Od.* 19.308; Plutarch, *Pomp.* 73.6-7.
- 45 For a detailed study of spikenard (νάρδος), see Fréderick Manns, "Lecture symbolique de Jean 12:1-11," *SBFLA* 36 (1986): 95-101. Manns notes especially the association between spikenard and the tree of life in Paradise, and incense used for sacrifice in the Jerusalem temple.
- 46 For other examples of the value of aromatic oil in antiquity, see 2 Kgs 20:13; Isa 39:2; Ezek 27:17 and Cynthia Wright Shelmerdine, *The Perfume Industry of Mycenaean Pylos* (Göteborg: Paul Åströms Förlag, 1985), 130-53.
- 47 See especially Gerald L. Borchert, *John 12-21*, (NAC 25B; ed. E. Ray Clendenen; Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2002), 38; and Keener, *Gospel*, 2:864. Regarding the specific connotations of wife/bride and husband/bridegroom implicit in Mary's action, see Fehribach, *Women*, 100-101.
- 48 Some scholars understand Mary's wiping action to be a realistic attempt to use up excess perfume, and thus an indication of the lavish quantity of perfume used. Cf. Lemmonyer, "L'onction de Béthanie: Notes d'exégèse sur Jean 12:1-8," 108 (quoting Lagrange); Reynier, "Le Thème," 211. Others suggest that Mary's use of her hair to wipe off the perfume offers prophetic announcement of Jesus' imminent resurrection. See R. H. Lightfoot, *St. John's Gospel: A Commentary* (ed. C. F. Evans; Oxford: Clarendon, 1956), 237-38. Cf. Benedetto Prete, "Un'aporia Giovanna: Il Testo di Giovanni 12,3," *RivB* 25 (1977): 372-73; and Charles Gibling, "Mary's Anointing for Jesus' Burial-Resurrection (John 12:1-8)," *NTS* 73 (1992): 560-64. Still others understand the wiping as symbolic of Mary's love for Jesus; cf. J. F. Coakley, "The Anointing at Bethany," *JBL* 107 (1988): 252. The majority of 20th-century commentators fail to engage the question at all and explain away the nature of Mary's wiping in John to be the result of textual corruption. Representative of this trend is A. Legault, "An Application of the Form-Critique Method to the Anointings in Galilee and Bethany," *CBQ* 16 (1954): 131-41.
- 49 For loosened hair as a sign of an unmarried woman, see Coakley, "Anointing," 250 n. 51; Fehribach, *Women*, 90-1; Charles H. Cosgrove, "A Woman's Unbound Hair in the Greco-Roman World, with Special Reference to the Story of the 'Sinful Woman' in Luke 7:36-50," *JBL* 124 (2005): 681-82. Regarding loosened hair as a sign of bereavement, see Lev 10:6; Sjef Van Tilborg, *Imaginative Love in John* (BibInt 2; Leiden: Brill, 1993), 198; Cosgrove, "Unbound Hair," 683-84; and in religious contexts, see Cosgrove, "Unbound Hair," 679-81.
- 50 Regarding the negative connotations of unbound hair for women as early as the first century see Mary R. Lefkowitz and Maureen B. Fant, *Women's Life in Greece and Rome* (London: Duckworth, 1982), 176. Regarding the wiping of another person with one's hair as an action becoming a slave, see van Tilborg, *Imaginative Love*, 198, citing Petronius, *Satyrica* 27. The depiction of Jesus in John 13:2-4, girded with a towel with which he wipes the disciples' feet (ἐκμάσσω), also matches the comportment of a slave or servant, though in different terms.

- 51 D and sy^a omit John 12:8. Φ^{75} , Λ , and a few Majority text manuscripts omit the latter half of the verse, which Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (corr. ed.; Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1975), 236-37 explains as the result of parablepsis. Regarding the reading of D and sy^a, see also Robert A. Holst, “The One Anointing of Jesus: Another Application of the Form-Critical Method,” *JBL* 95 (1976): 445; and Schnackenburg, *Gospel*, 2:369. These scholars view the harmonization of this reading with either Matthew or Mark as questionable. It may have been omitted because it seemed too dismissive toward the poor. See, however, Bultmann, *John*, 416; Brown, *Gospel*, 449; Fortna, *Gospel of Signs*, 151; and Charles H. Dodd, *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 165-66, who view the reading as a late scribal addition and emphasize the verse’s similarities, not differences, with the synoptic accounts. The present essay is in agreement with Dodd and therefore disregards John 12:8 in its investigation of the anointing.
- 52 Regarding the Qumran community as a group that conducted community burials ordinarily observed by the family of the deceased, see Rachel Hachlili, *Jewish Funerary Customs, Rites, and Practices in the Second Temple Period* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 20. Acts 9:36-39 describes the burial preparation of Tabitha by a community of Christian “widows.” Regarding the custom of disciples for their masters, see Andreas Köstenberger, “Jesus as Rabbi in the Fourth Gospel,” *BBR* 8 (1998):123; for similar practices throughout the Greco-Roman world, see J. M. C. Toynbee, *Death and Burial in the Roman World* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971), 54-55.
- 53 Hachlili, *Funerary Customs*, 479-80, observes, “Funerary ceremonies and rites upon death were crucial, and were administered to the dead by their relatives. The family indeed played the prominent part in the funeral, and most of the routine rites its members conducted in various stages were similar to Greek customs.... The family was responsible for the funeral, the coffins, women keeners, and pipers.”
- 54 Regarding the involvement of kinswomen in burial preparation as practiced by Greeks, see Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (New York: Schocken, 1995), 43-44; regarding the Roman practice, see Kathleen Corley, *Women and the Historical Jesus: Feminist Myths of Christian Origins* (Santa Rosa, Ca.: Polebridge, 2002), 111. Toynbee, *Death and Burial*, 43-44, describes the involvement of the Roman household in funerary rites: “When death was imminent relations and close friends gathered round the dying person’s bed The nearest relative present gave the last kiss The same relative then closed the departed’s eyes...after which all the near relatives called upon the dead by name . . . and lamented him or her.”
- 55 For a more detailed description of the funerary banquet (*perideipnon*), see Smith, *Symposium*, 40. In a Jewish context, the meal would have been eaten by the mourners following the burial at the home of the deceased. Among Romans, the *silicernium* would have been eaten at the grave on the same day as the burial (see especially Toynbee, *Death and Burial*, 50-51). Osiek and Balch, *Families*, 212, describe the Roman practice of remembering the deceased by sharing a meal together in the tomb (*refrigerium*).
- 56 See Lev 10:6. Regarding loosened, disheveled, or torn hair as a part of the mourning ritual within a Greco-Roman context, see van Tilborg, *Imaginative Love*, 198; Pomeroy, *Goddesses*, 44; Toynbee, *Death and Burial*, 45; and Cosgrove, “Unbound Hair,” 682-83.
- 57 Cf. Plutarch, *Arist.* 21.3; and Aeschylus, *Pers.* 615-18. For an example of how the custom is reflected in the Pseudepigrapha, see *Apoc. Mos.* 40:6. Regarding the influence of Greek culture on this aspect of Jewish mourning ritual, see Corely, *Women*, 116; and Hachlili, *Funerary Customs*, 376.
- 58 See Sylvester John Saller, *Excavations at Bethany: 1949-1953* (Jerusalem: Franciscan Press, 1957), 52; and Hachlili, *Funerary Customs*, 383-85.
- 59 See, e.g., Iliad, 23.170; Shelmerdine, *Perfume Industry*, 126; and Cuthbert and Atchley, *History*, 58-59.
- 60 And so “church” with a small “c” as opposed to “Church” in the ideal sense, the invisible church or *Una Sancta*.

ヨハネ福音書における家族像と救済史 ヨハネ 12：1 - 7 の意味を見直す

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この論文は第4福音書における救済史、つまりイエスの受難と死を考察し、ベタニアでイエスに香料が塗られたことの意味に焦点を合わせている。同じようなエピソードが共観福音書でも伝えられており、これまで多くの研究が口頭伝承の展開に関する理論に基づきヨハネ12：1 - 7の意味を捉えている。この論文は、ヨハネ12：1 - 7の文脈にも、ヘブル語聖書を含む1世紀の文献を踏まえたこのテキストの社会史的な背景にも焦点を合わせており、先行する研究の補足となる。特に第4福音書の最初の聴衆にとって、ベタニアのマリアがイエスの親類、つまりイエスが自分の「兄弟達」と呼んだ者達の姉妹になったことを、ヨハネ12：1 - 7のエピソードがどのように暗示したかを説明する。その結果として、共同体を奪われた現在の読者達も、キリストの死を通し集められている、神の新しい共同体に導かれると言える。

Key Words：香料を塗る，ベタニアのマリア，救済史，家／家族像，ヨハネによる福音書