

Isaiah 43: 16 - 21  
Psalm 126  
Philippians 3: 4b - 14  
John 12: 1 - 8

### Notes on the Epistle Lesson

Two quick notes on this Sunday's lesson:

In Mediterranean culture, one's honor was primarily dependant on the family from which one came. If one was born into a family with a great ancestor or a family with great prestige, one was accorded great honor. Paul's lineage does not only have great honor; it is flawless. He can claim greater honor than anyone with whom he comes in contact.

Yet Paul does something that is almost unthinkable in that culture. He abdicates the position that birth and his own accomplishments provided him, giving them up for the "supreme value of knowing Christ Jesus" as his Lord. Indeed, Paul goes further. The word in verse 8 that is usually translated as "rubbish" is the Greek word *skubalon*, which literally refers to human excrement. Paul could not have made a more drastic contrast between the values of human society and the values of God's kingdom.

### Notes on the Gospel Lesson

There were two calendars used in first-century Palestine. Most people, including the Pharisees and Sadducees, used the lunar calendar that is still used in modern Judaism. Some groups, such as the Essenes, used a 360-day solar calendar. This meant that there were often a few days difference in the beginnings of festivals for different people. "Six days before the Passover" meant either the Wednesday before the Palm Sunday or the Saturday night immediately prior to that Palm Sunday.

Although most people in Jesus' day ate standing, the wealthy ate at a U-shaped three-sided table known as a *triclinium*. These tables were low to the ground and instead of sitting; diners reclined on their left side, eating with their right hand (see photo right). This allowed Mary access to Jesus' feet.



It should be noted that Mary and Martha were living in the home of their brother, Lazarus. As women were married early in their teens, this means that instead of the grown women usually depicted, Mary and Martha were adolescents.

However, her youth did not excuse Mary's actions in the eyes of those gathered at the dinner. In the eastern culture a woman is to show her hair to no man other than her husband. To do so is shameful and indecent. Even in this day, Muslim and Orthodox Jewish women wear scarves, snoods, and wigs to cover their own hair. Mary is demonstrating an intimacy that would have been highly improper.

Yet Jesus refused to condemn her and defended her from Judas' complaint that the money was not given to the poor. He instead pointed to the cross that awaited him in a few days time.