

**John 12:1-19**  
**(Psalm 116:12-19; Philippians 3:7-14)**  
**“Understanding the Times”**

## **Introduction**

Most people go through life with only the vaguest notion of the significance of the times in which they live. We are, after all, busy getting on with things, good things, necessary things: education, work, friendship, exercise, entertainment. Many of us wake up in midlife and realize that our quest for success does not satisfy the deeper longing for significance. And yet too few of us understand that our longing for significance is linked to our understanding the significance of the times in which we live. Merely deferring such questions to a later time, to vacation or retirement or, for Christians, the life to come, robs us of the joy of living now, this very day, in step with God’s Spirit, enlightened and empowered by a sense of the significance of our decisions, desires and deeds, because we are living with a larger view of the significance of our times.

What am I talking about? Look, for example, at our text. John records one of the most significant days in human history, one that has been remembered and celebrated for nearly two thousand years, and that today is being celebrated around the world by some two billion people, nearly one-third the world’s population. And yet those who waved palm branches and welcomed Jesus to Jerusalem with cries of “Hosanna” that first Palm Sunday did not understand the times. They thought Jesus was coming to re-establish David’s throne, to overthrow a political oppressor, and when he disappointed their hopes, they turned on him within a few days, and their welcoming shouts of joy turned to cries of “Crucify!” Even his disciples did not understand the times. Jesus repeatedly had to tell them, “My time has not yet come.”

But there was one disciple who understood, one who had remained so close and attentive to Jesus heart that she heard the cry of his heart, while others forced their own meaning onto his words. I’m speaking, of course, of Mary – not his mother Mary nor Mary Magdalene – but Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus. And as we enter Holy Week 2009 – except for Jesus himself – there is probably no one whom we could more fruitfully consider than Mary, so that we might learn from her how to understand the times and how to make the most of this brief moment of time entrusted to us, a moment so quickly past, and yet so filled with relationships and opportunities of eternal significance.

## **Body**

### **1. How does one understand the times?**

Mary spent her time at Jesus’ feet, listening to his teaching, pondering his words.

**2. How does one make the most of the times?**

Mary gave her best, probably her dowry, lavishly holding back nothing.

**3. How do folk respond to one who truly understands the times?**

They are generally critical, counseling a more practical, less extravagant response.

**4. How does Jesus respond to one who understands the times?**

She has done something beautiful for me, for only she understands the times. Her act must be remembered and told as part of the gospel.

**5. Finally, how will we respond this morning?**

Will we, like Mary, sit at Jesus' feet until we understand the times, and then respond by lavishly, irrevocably giving him our best?

**Conclusion**

Holy Week is a moment in time that invites the kind of attentive, contemplative listening that marked Mary's relationship with Jesus, and that invites us to understand our times as the redemptive moment entrusted to us, our one and only opportunity to respond like Mary to God's lavish gift to us by giving him our best, by laying ourselves down for him and for those whom he has entrusted to us.

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