


Gospel of John #19
Awkward Vulnerability
John 12

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Cue Star Wars music:

John 12

In a time long ago, our saga unfolds with epic magnitude. Jesus, the Word, who was with God and was God. Descending to dwell among us, He performs miracles like turning water into wine and offering eternal truths that challenge and inspire. His most astonishing act: raising Lazarus from the dead, a defiance of death itself that solidifies His role as the bringer of life and deepens His bonds with Mary and Martha. As tensions mount and the forces of light and darkness gather, the stage is set for a brewing storm of conflict and sacrifice, leading us into Chapter 12 with a promise of inevitable and dramatic clashes.



I love Star Wars, the epic battle of dark and light. We've been in a similar battle for the first 11 chapters of John including a bit of mystery of who exactly Jesus is. But then in John 11, Jesus raises Lazarus. In John 12, the intensity is done: death has been defeated! This was pretty fantastic: the crowds think maybe the Messiah is here and they can now get rid of the Romans.

Act One

Chapter **12 (John)** begins:

1 Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. **2** Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor

A dinner honoring Lazarus and Jesus opens John 12. No one was thinking things were going to go bad but if you had paid attention, Mary of Bethany foretells a twist in the story when she pours perfume on Jesus's feet and wipes them with her hair.

Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. **3** Then Mary took about a pint^[a] of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

Imagine your sister doing this at a party today! A woman's hair was honorable and sexual and certainly women shouldn't touch men in public with their hair. But Mary shows **awkward vulnerability**.

To be a follower of Jesus means being called into **awkward vulnerability** constantly!

With Mary, she does what she thinks she should do. John quickly tells us Judas's response;

4 But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, **5** "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages.^[b]" **6** He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.

Judas was uncomfortable and wanted to take away this situation. Notice that people will judge you when you are vulnerable. Here, Jesus defends Mary::

7 "Leave her alone," Jesus replied. "It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial.

We know Mary didn't know about Jesus's death and resurrection. However, she may have figured out that people were not pleased with him and she may have thought this was her last moment to show him this.

8 You will always have the poor among you,^[c] but you will not always have me.”

9 Meanwhile a large crowd of Jews found out that Jesus was there and came, not only because of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead.

People were figuring out that Jesus was not a “normal” Messiah; the religious leaders thought that this could get out of hand. The priests were after him.

10 So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well, **11** for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and believing in him.

12 The next day the great crowd that had come for the festival heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. **13** They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting,

“Hosanna!”

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!

“Blessed is the king of Israel!”

Hosanna means “Please save us.” This is **awkward and vulnerable**: The people are asking Jesus to save them from the Romans (not from their sin). This was on the day that people were moving towards Passover. To prepare for Passover, they select a lamb and adopt it as a pet and then after a few days, they kill it. This was to realize the cost for their deliverance.

There could have been hundreds of thousands of people waving palm branches.

14 Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, as it is written:

15 “Do not be afraid, Daughter Zion;
see, your king is coming,
seated on a donkey’s colt.”^[d]

If Jesus was on a horse, he would be declaring war. But he came on a donkey to declare peace.

16 At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him and that these things had been done to him.

17 Now the crowd that was with him when he called Lazarus from the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to spread the word. **18** Many people, because they had

heard that he had performed this sign, went out to meet him. **19** So the Pharisees said to one another, "See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!"

The raising of Lazarus hasn't fixed anything: many people are looking at Jesus to save them.

Act Two

20 Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the festival.

The Greeks were like Gen Z: they liked to hang out and take pictures of each other. As tourists, they wanted to see Jesus so they asked Philip for this opportunity.

21 They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. "Sir," they said, "we would like to see Jesus." **22** Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus.

We don't know if they succeeded or not: Instead, Jesus talks in parables.

23 Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

How many times did Jesus declare it was NOT his hour? However, ***now it has come!***

24 Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.

Gen 3 and 12: there is a link between the seed and the kernel. Can anyone explain this link to me? Jesus is saying that if he doesn't die, the movement cannot happen. He is saying he must die so the Kingdom fruit can spread everywhere. He also talks about what it looks like to follow him into to this:

25 Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. **26** Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.

What does "HATE" mean here? If I tell you that I love chocolate ice cream but I hate vanilla ice cream, it doesn't mean I won't eat vanilla. Instead, it's used to compare things; it's saying that I like vanilla much much better. In order to follow Jesus, you are going to have to let go of your life. You are going to have to hate your life currently in order to gain true life.

Loving life here and now = being narcissistic, controlling, and holding onto the ways of the world. **Awkward vulnerability** is being willing to step into things that feel uncomfortable. Following Jesus may feel like dying as things are stripped off of you. But if you are willing to do this, God will honor you.

27 “Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour.

28 Father, glorify your name!”

Jesus is talking to himself, almost responding to what he said before this. He is offering his emotions: asking people to follow him is hard. But this was from the Father.

Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.” **29** The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him.

30 Jesus said, “This voice was for your benefit, not mine. **31** Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. **32** And I, when I am lifted up^g from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” **33** He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.

Here is when he clearly spells out what is going to happen. This is a more **awkward vulnerability**: The prince of this world will be destroyed by the prince of peace, who will die to defeat not the Romans but the one who is the prince of this world. He does this by riding in on a donkey. **Humility** is what defeats the enemy!

34 The crowd spoke up, “We have heard from the Law that the Messiah will remain forever, so how can you say, ‘The Son of Man must be lifted up’? Who is this ‘Son of Man’?”



Here is the fun stuff: The book of Daniel is like a 1st-century graphic novel that people tried to figure out.

When we left the garden, we got more and more beastly: today, beasts are running all over the world, devouring and destroying.

In Daniel, he talks about the son of man and his ascension:

Dan 7:13-14

13 "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man,^[a] coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. **14** He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

This is about Jesus ruling and defeating death and the prince of this world. The Jewish people had this in their heads. Jesus is not a BEAST. Jesus is HUMAN. Because of the fall, **we became beasts** but Jesus, the human, offers us a way to become human again. He turns us around and points us toward the garden.

Jesus repeats this in **John 11:35-36**

35 Then Jesus told them, "You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you. Whoever walks in the dark does not know where they are going. **36** Believe in the light while you have the light, so that you may become children of light." When he had finished speaking, Jesus left and hid himself from them.

In the gospel of John, we go back and forth between light and dark. Let's talk a moment about walking in darkness so we can better understand walking vulnerably in the light.

Darkness:

1. **Fosters Spiritual Blindness** (**John 1:5** The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome.) To not overcome (or not comprehend) darkness means an inability to understand light, like the men trying to figure out what the elephant really is. It is an inability to see what is good and right. When we're in the darkness we cannot really see.
2. **Fosters Wickedness and Deceit:** You do things in the darkness that you don't want people to see. This is what people are afraid of (the monster under the bed). We know that wickedness and deceit are in the darkness; there is not vulnerability here.
3. **Fosters Death** **John 8:12b** "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." Darkness cannot comprehend the light.

4. **Fosters Confusion John 12:35b.** Whoever walks in the dark does not know where they are going. Darkness creates confusion; light gives direction.

Act Three

John 13:42 Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not openly acknowledge their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; **43** for they loved human praise more than praise from God.

This is **awkward vulnerability**, the call of the disciples. They were defined by other humans, not Jesus. We spend our life being defined by others: what they might think if we step forward. It is clear we need to go off being defined by other people. We are going to be called into spaces where this will become essential.

This chapter marks the end of Jesus's public ministry: the rest is his private teaching to his disciples.

44 Then Jesus cried out, "Whoever believes in me does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me. **45** The one who looks at me is seeing the one who sent me. **46** I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.

This is the invitation to us as well. You and I have an opportunity to look at Jesus, step into **awkward vulnerability**, and escape from darkness.

Some ways to apply this:

1. **Share your story** (talk about your past and how Jesus intervenes in it. This is super exposing. What struggles did you have? What kind of crucible did Jesus deliver you from?
2. **Confess and seek accountability.** Wickedness and deceit live in darkness. If we say we lie or don't like others, this is awkward and vulnerable. It offers a time to ask for forgiveness.
3. **Ask for help**, especially in something we are completely capable of doing. You might find you really did need help!
4. **Serve** in new ways
5. **Engage in difficult conversations.** As a pastor, I find this to be really hard. This is **awkward and vulnerable.**

6. **Pray Publicly:** proclaiming God's word is **vulnerable**. When you pray out loud and others hear it, the Spirit uses your words.
7. Always **embrace learning**, especially things you don't agree with. The disciples wanted to steelman everyone's arguments. If you are someone who has a biblical ethic, listen to others in an honoring way, not undermining them.

47 "If anyone hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge that person. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. **48** There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; the very words I have spoken will condemn them at the last day. **49** For I did not speak on my own, but the Father who sent me commanded me to say all that I have spoken. **50** I know that his command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say."