

Sunday, April 3, 2022 – Fifth Sunday in Lent

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Introduction

Our God makes all things new. In the first reading God promises it. In the gospel Mary anticipates it, anointing Jesus' feet with costly perfume in preparation for the day of his burial. In the second reading Paul recalls his transformation from the persecutor Saul into an apostle. In baptism, God's new person (you!) rises daily from the deadly mire of trespasses and sins.

Prayer of the Day

Creator God, you prepare a new way in the wilderness, and your grace waters our desert. Open our hearts to be transformed by the new thing you are doing, that our lives may proclaim the extravagance of your love given to all through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

First Reading: Isaiah 43:16-21

The prophet declares that long ago God performed mighty deeds and delivered Israel from Egyptian bondage through the waters of the sea. Now, God is about to do a new thing, bringing the exiles out of Babylon and through the wilderness in a new Exodus.

¹⁶Thus says the LORD,
who makes a way in the sea,
a path in the mighty waters,
¹⁷who brings out chariot and horse,
army and warrior;
they lie down, they cannot rise,
they are extinguished, quenched like a wick:
¹⁸Do not remember the former things,
or consider the things of old.
¹⁹I am about to do a new thing;
now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?
I will make a way in the wilderness
and rivers in the desert.
²⁰The wild animals will honor me,
the jackals and the ostriches;
for I give water in the wilderness,
rivers in the desert,
to give drink to my chosen people,
²¹the people whom I formed for myself
so that they might declare my praise.

Psalm 126

¹When the LORD restored the for- | tunes of Zion,
then were we like | those who dream.

²**Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with | shouts of joy.
Then they said among the nations, “The LORD has done great | things for them.”**

³The LORD has done great | things for us,
and we are | glad indeed.

⁴**Restore our for- | tunes, O LORD,
like the watercourses | of the Negeb.**

⁵Those who | sowed with tears
will reap with | songs of joy.

⁶**Those who go out weeping, carry- | ing the seed,
will come again with joy, shoulder- | ing their sheaves.**

Second Reading: Philippians 3:4b-14

Writing to Christians in Philippi, Paul admits that his heritage and reputation could give him more reason than most people to place confidence in his spiritual pedigree. But the overwhelming grace of God in Jesus calls Paul to a new set of values.

[Paul writes:] ^{4b}If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more:

⁵circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

⁷Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. ⁸More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith. ¹⁰I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, ¹¹if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

¹²Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. ¹³Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

Gospel Reading: John 12:1-8

Judas willfully misinterprets as waste Mary's extravagant act of anointing Jesus' feet with costly perfume. Jesus recognizes that her lavish gift is both an expression of love and an anticipation of his burial.

¹Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. ²There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. ³Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. ⁴But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, ⁵"Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" ⁶(He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) ⁷Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. ⁸You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."

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Prayers of Intercession

Drawn close to the heart of God, we offer these prayers for the church, the world, and all who are in need, saying “Merciful God,” and responding, “receive our prayer.”

A brief silence.

Do a new thing in the church. Free us from paradigms that no longer serve the gospel and bring forward leaders who imagine fresh ways of doing ministry. Give us courage in the face of change. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Do a new thing for creation. Reverse the trajectory of climate change and environmental catastrophe. Revive habitats already impaired by human disregard. Amplify the voices of climate scientists and researchers working to chart a new course. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Do a new thing in our world. Break barriers that prevent political enemies from working together for the well-being of all. Make a way for peace and collaboration among the nations. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Do a new thing for those who suffer. Reveal a path for any who are unemployed or underemployed, for those experiencing homelessness, and for all who struggle with money. Comfort those who grieve and restore those who are sick (*especially those we name at this time, silently on our hearts or aloud...*). Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Do a new thing within us. Direct us into encounters that broaden our understanding of the human experience. Amplify voices that are ignored or devalued (*especially*). Deliver us especially from the scourge of racism. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Do a new thing in our death. Fill us with the knowledge of Christ and the power of his resurrection as we give thanks for all the saints who have attained the prize of their heavenly call. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Accept the prayers we bring, O God, on behalf of a world in need, for the sake of Jesus Christ.

Amen.

A reflection for the Fifth Sunday in Lent...

Facing Death

Mary of Bethany recognizes Jesus' mission: he has come to die. Perceiving the new thing God is doing, she embraces his death and pours out her devotion to Jesus in an extravagant act. The prophet beseeches the Israelites to forget the old pattern of salvation—the dry way through the Red Sea. Now God will make a new way, a wet way, in a dry, barren, and death-filled place.

On this Sunday in Lent, salvation lies not behind us but before us, through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Mary's action in the face of death is bold. She anoints a corpse, and in so doing honors Jesus' vulnerability and his life. She models love for the other disciples and for us.

By honestly facing the reality of death, we are more fully able to live honoring our own vulnerability and the humanity of others. We live with gratitude. We are more able to love one another and God extravagantly. However, in our culture, mortality is often avoided. The stench of death is removed through chemicals, and deceased bodies are cosmetically enhanced to appear as life-like as possible.

Each day, we the baptized boldly face death, trusting that God has made a new way, a wet way, to travel from death to life. God in Christ has honored human vulnerability by becoming flesh and by laying down his own life. He is the new way through a dry, barren, and death-filled place. Because Christ Jesus has made them his own, the baptized walk wet through the desert places of this life, pouring out the whole of their lives, down to the very last hair, in extravagant love for God and for the people God has formed.

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