

# Fifth Sunday in Lent

Year C: April 7, 2019  
The Rev. Dr. Gail Shafer

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

I am about to do a new thing. Do you not perceive it?

what is that new thing here at Trinity? Our scripture today inspires us to seek out our wildest dreams. Have you given any thought to what we can do here, in this place? We are small but mighty, with inspiration and a common goal.

There are many around us that are in need.

Isaiah speaks to Israel ---- dreaming of freedom and the promise of a triumphant return to their home land from exile in Babylon. They dare to dream, to put away the former things and live into the new thing God is about to do. Those in exile had given up any hope. It took Isaiah and many others who remained faithful to God for the dream of return to come true. This was truly a new thing. Unexpected, unprecedented. The king that held them captive, didn't just allow their return, He provided for their journey.

Paul tells us that nothing in the past compares to the resurrection of Jesus the Christ. The new thing that God did for us. We are reunited with God. Given

salvation through Grace. Paul knows that he will face death, just as Christ faced death. But he holds on to the promise and hope of salvation.

There is a movie about Paul's last days with his church in Rome. He encourages them to face their deaths as martyrs not afraid, but filled with hope, and love.

"There will be pain," He says, "but it will not last long. Then you will be with Jesus." I was struck by the unconditional love for even the executioners that Paul demonstrated. Love so filled those early Christians that it was protection against the fear that was all around them.

John's Gospel tells us that Jesus stopped at the home of his dear friends, Lazarus, Mary, and Martha. The other Gospels, written when being a Christian was a death sentence, did not specifically name anyone, to protect them. In this rendition written down after the temple was destroyed, and the first generation had died. Now safe from persecution, the participants could be named.

Like the disciples that waited with Christ in Bethany, we await His return to Jerusalem. There must have been some excitement as they contemplated his entry as King of the Jews. As the entrance to the city was being staged, the disciples must have considered how triumphant the return would be.

Forgetting Jesus explaining the outcome of his return to Jerusalem would be filled with pain. That their lives would undergo yet another transition.

As they rested and dined at the home of Lazarus, Martha waited on them as always. The disciples had not processed Christ's impending death. But Mary understood. She anointed Jesus feet with precious ointment, and her tears, filling the house with fragrance. This act is depicted in some form in every Gospel. And each time Mary is chastised by one or more of the male companions. But Jesus is grateful to her. He tells the others that Mary "gets it." She anoints him as her King, her priest, and her savior. She knows that he will die to give her salvation, redemption as a sinner. She is giving him comfort because she paid attention. He reminds the others that he those they serve, the poor, will always be with them but he will not.

Nothing is ahead now, but the path to the cross. Raising Lazarus meant the leadership of the Jews would want to kill him. And the way he would enter Jerusalem made it even more certain. His vision was clear.

Howard and I spent the last four days in Chicago, for some rest and relaxation. We enjoyed fine food, stayed in our favorite hotel, revisited some of our favorite places. We walked to the lake front, took cabs to the Hancock Building for dinner where we enjoyed the sunset. At the Art Institute we saw four of Rembrandt's most famous paintings. We saw a fantastic play, and visited with family.

And everywhere we went, as part of the tapestry of Chicago, we saw and heard the poor. They rattled the change in their paper cups. Jesus was right. Two thousand years later, we still have the poor with us. Hardened by living on the street and having to beg for a living. Separated from us by the accident of birthright privilege, lack of opportunity, poor choices, and just dumb luck.

Mary gave Jesus a moment of comfort, that represented her extravagant love. He expressed his gratitude for such a gift. Robbed of the purity of the moment by the reminder that there were others that were in need. He needed just a moment of comfort.

As I reviewed the scripture for today, I learned a number of things.

Be thankful every day. Count your blessings. Its easy to forget just how much I have. When I feel wronged, or jealous, or left out. All I have to do is look around me, and there are so many that have so much less than I. Someone who hasn't enjoyed the privilege of a stable home, school, enough to eat, and adequate clothing. Someone who needs help, encouragement, love, support, direction.

From Paul I've learned that just following the rules isn't enough. He was the epitomy of the Jew's Jew. All his life he followed the letter of the law. Then he encountered Jesus in a new way. Suddenly, no longer the prosecutor, he

became the persecuted. And as he faced the consequences of following Jesus, he found a new law, Love.

Don't be deterred from doing good things for those you love for fear of others opinion. Mary followed her heart. She showed her love for her King – her Priest – her Savior. And her memorable act has been held up as an example and lesson for thousands of years. It was a simple, extravagant act of love. She reminds us that actions of the heart are worth doing.

Treasure the present. Mary gave Christ her love – and Christ tells us that what we have in front of us needs our appreciation. Things we love must be cherished in the now. We will lose them. They will pass away in time. I can tell you that nothing changes our perception of what is important than the loss of a loved one, the loss of financial security, life threatening injury or illness. Christ isn't telling us that its okay to avoid helping and loving those who need us. He is telling us to care for those we know and love as well.

As we await Holy Week, what do we anticipate? Surely there will be the joyful family dinners. The traditional feasts on lamb or ham with all the trimmings. And we can finally enjoy those things we gave up. Relax the disciplines we took on.

How did you do on all that? How many gave up something? Who took on a new discipline? Was this like a New Year's resolution - lasting just a short time, or did you make it through the whole season?

Will you want to hold on to those new habits?

This new thing that you did for Lent. Is it a new thing you can continue?

As Lent concludes this week, I encourage you to spend some time engaging in the lessons from today. What kind of radical dream do you have of Trinity in the coming months and years? Think of that little band of disciples, hiding from the Romans and their own leaders, planning the entrance into Jerusalem that will seal their fate. Forever in history as those who changed the world.

Do you have a vision of changing our world? Living into our mission as Christ's disciples right here in Grand Ledge? What is our memorable act of Love?

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