

Bible Tuesday for Lent VI, 2019

Isaiah 43:16-21

<sup>16</sup> Thus says the Lord,  
    who makes a way in the sea,  
    a path in the mighty waters,  
<sup>17</sup> who brings out chariot and horse,  
    army and warrior;  
they lie down, they cannot rise,  
    they are extinguished, quenched like a wick:  
<sup>18</sup> Do not remember the former things,  
    or consider the things of old.  
<sup>19</sup> I 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.  
<sup>20</sup> The 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,  
<sup>21</sup> the people whom I formed for myself  
so that they might declare my praise.

In this passage of Third Isaiah, God promises fidelity to Israel and God's covenant with it. God called Israel "my chosen people" and granted them Canaan for their eternal inheritance. However, God also punished the northern kingdom by allowing it to fall to Assyria and the southern kingdom by allowing it to fall to Babylon. Israel does not trust God after being destroyed and held captive by Babylon.

In this passage, God begins his address to Israel by reestablishing God's credentials, "I am the God who brought your ancestors safely out of slavery in Egypt by parting the waters for my children but catching Pharaoh's chariot wheels, in pursuit of you, in the mud. However, that was then and this is now. I will do something completely new to save you. For you I will make a safe road in the desert so that you may return in Canaan in safety and joy."

Psalm 126

A Song of Ascents.

<sup>1</sup> When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion,<sup>[a]</sup>  
    we were like those who dream.  
<sup>2</sup> Then our mouth was filled with laughter,  
    and our tongue with shouts of joy;  
then it was said among the nations,  
    "The Lord has done great things for them."  
<sup>3</sup> The Lord has done great things for us,  
    and we rejoiced.

<sup>4</sup> Restore our fortunes, O Lord,  
like the watercourses in the Negeb.  
<sup>5</sup> May those who sow in tears  
reap with shouts of joy.  
<sup>6</sup> Those who go out weeping,  
bearing the seed for sowing,  
shall come home with shouts of joy,  
carrying their sheaves.

This psalm was used as a hymn to sing while climbing Zion hill to enter the Temple in Jerusalem, situated atop Zion. The first verses tell the story of Israel returning to Canaan from captivity in Babylonia from the Israelite point of view.

Verse 4 and following prays that God will grant those same blessings of freedom, joy, and celebration to all Israel in their current lives.

“Watercourses of the Negev(b)” – The Negev or Negeb is a semi-arid land in the southwest of the Promised Land. The central Negev receives 4” of rain a year so plant life there relies on water flowages from rains in higher elevations. When those flow, the plants that draw moisture from the watercourses soon bloom and the now watered area “comes alive,” like the blooming desert in the American southwest.

Philippians 3:4-14

If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: <sup>5</sup> circumcised 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; <sup>6</sup> as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

<sup>7</sup> Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. <sup>8</sup> More 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 <sup>9</sup> and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ,<sup>[a]</sup> the righteousness from God based on faith. <sup>10</sup> I want to know Christ<sup>[b]</sup> and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, <sup>11</sup> if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

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

Paul was raised in the upper echelon of Jewish society. He was a Pharisee, one of the two political parties of Jewish religious leadership in Jesus’ day. Paul also states that his life from birth on has been lived in complete obedience to the Law of Moses. In other words, Paul is golden and counted on God’s favor always, in life and afterlife.

But Paul's counter with Jesus on the road to Damascus changed it all. Righteousness in the Law, Paul learned, was not attainable, so all his efforts to do so were worthless. From that Damascus encounter on, Paul lived his life in and for Jesus. That included preaching, teaching, guiding, and cajoling all, Jews and Gentiles, to live in and for Jesus too.

#### John 12:1-8

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

Lazarus, Mary, and Martha lived in Bethany, just two miles outside Jerusalem. Jesus and his disciples and apostles came to stay with them on route to Jerusalem for Palm Sunday and the ensuing days. Mary, Martha, and Lazarus threw Jesus a dinner party. During the party, Mary did something highly symbolic and extravagant. Mary blew a year's wages on a jar of luxurious anointing perfume. This nard was so difficult to come by and expensive that it was reserved for anointing prophets for ministry, new kings for ascension to the throne, and for the burial of royalty. Mary is anointing Jesus for his coronation and his burial, all in the coming days.

Whatever Judas' motivations, he raises a valid question, "Should the faithful, the baptized, be extravagant, luxurious, when so many are in need?" Jesus' response is confusing. So we can be lavish and luxurious, extravagant, as long as we "do it for Jesus?" If so, how does that work?

The Greek is quite confusing in this passage. The declarative "The poor you must always have with you," is the same grammatically in Greek as "The poor are always with you," which can be understood as, "The poor are always among or around you." Traditionally, this phrase has been understood to mean, there are always poor people everywhere but Jesus was only on earth for a very limited time. Following the trajectory of this meaning, this phrase has been used to justify the church not ministering to the poor but instead weave gold threads into vestments and paraments, casting gold chalices, patens, ciboriums, and monstrances, and building lavish churches into which the poor are discouraged from going.

Perhaps Jesus' statement meant simply, "You must always keep the poor among you, but right now my days with you are very limited. Extravagant acts of love, of generosity, to me are beautiful and should not be criticized."

Take note, in John's gospel, this story of anointing takes place in Lazarus' house and is done by his sister, Mary. In Luke's gospel, this event takes place at a Pharisee's house who had invited Jesus to dinner. The woman is an unnamed "sinful woman", which is frequently interpreted to mean a prostitute, though the Greek does not make that clear. She anoints Jesus feet only with the alabaster jar of perfume and her tears and dries them with her hair. The time frame in Luke is during Jesus' ministry, not on his way to Jerusalem. In Matthew and in Mark, the event takes place in the days immediately preceding Palm Sunday, and in Bethany, but in the home of Simon the Leper, not Lazarus. An unnamed woman (not described as "sinful" or anything else) comes in with an alabaster jar of perfume and anoints Jesus' head only. No feet, not tears. None of the gospels tell us that Mary Magdalene anointed Jesus head or feet or anything. Luke 8:1-3 tells us that Mary Magdalene was a disciple of Jesus from whom Jesus drove out 7 spirits. Yet, Church tradition tells us that Mary Magdalene was a prostitute who anointed Jesus feet with tear and perfume, and dried them with her hair. "Jesus Christ Superstar" perpetuates with myth with "I don't know how to love him."

This act by a woman of anointing Jesus for kingship and death was received by Jesus as love but by at least Judas as sin. What a hard time we have seeing things through Jesus' eyes.