

5 Lent

Isaiah 43:16-21

Psalms 126

Philippians 3:4b-14

John 12:1-8

May the words of my mouth and the secret meditations of our hearts be always acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

“Thus says the Lord, ‘ Do not remember former things or consider the things of old, 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.’”

I do not know about you, but I need to hang on to that promise since Lent seems to drag on forever. It is one of the periods of the church year where it seems that I am in a desert, nothing seems to be happening, and it

goes on and on and on.. And not just because I am fasting from my favorite snack or because I have taken on an additional discipline that makes for longer days.

It reminds me of the trip in Israel when we were traveling through the wilderness. It was so dry and desolate. I wondered aloud if God really loved the Israelites, why put them in such a wilderness. Why do I have to live in the spiritual desert?

A few days later, we traveled through an area where fields were irrigated. My farming background could cheer at the productivity of those fields. The difference that water makes in the desert. When will God provide rivers in my desert?

When it rains in the Australian desert, you want to make a pilgrimage.. huge areas of wild flowers.. the desert really does bloom.

The prophet Isaiah tells us that the Lord has/is promising a new thing.. water in the wilderness.

Water that makes the wilderness into a fertile garden. When, O Lord, when?

Psalms 42 begins:

“As a deer longs for the water brooks,
So my soul longs for you O God.

My soul is athirst for God, athirst for the living God.

My tears have been my food day and night,
while all day long they say to me, 'Where now is your God?'

I pour out my soul when I think on these things,
how I went with the multitude and led them into the house of God,
With the voice of praise and thanksgiving,
among those who keep holy-days.

Why are you so full of heaviness, O my soul?

And why are you so disquieted within me?

Put your trust in God,
For I will yet give thanks to him, who is the help of my countenance, and my God.”

The desert waits patiently. Everything seems to be dead. And yet, deep in the sand the seeds wait for the life giving rain.

“I am about to do a new thing” says the Lord.

Paul reminds us of his background. He says he has more reason to be proud than anyone else.

“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, and to zeal, a persecutor of the church, as to righteousness under the law blameless.”

‘Yet whatever I had, these I come to regard as loss because of Christ.’ A new thing for Paul.

Like the Psalmist whose soul cries out for God, Paul longed to know Christ and the power of his resurrection.

So.. “forgetting what lies behind, and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.”

How long O Lord, how long must I wait?

And then I think of Jesus life during this time.

Did he wonder as he traveled toward Jerusalem how much longer it would be? Did he wonder exactly what was in store for him? Even as he taught in the temple, even as he overturned the money changers, even as he healed the sick.. did he wonder how long

before all this ends? How long O Lord till the new thing is done?

I expect like the rest of us as we await ‘the new thing’ that God promises.. the human part of Jesus needed the support of his friends.

Our gospel tells us that he went to Bethany to spend time with his friends Mary, Martha and Lazarus, and I expect with those disciples who traveled with him on this journey to Jerusalem.

A comfortable home. A place he had visited often. His friend Lazarus who he raised from the dead; the sisters who feed him, and listened to him; who seemed to understand at least a little of his mission. An oasis in the midst of his travels. A place to find support and strength as he contemplated his future.

It was in this place our story continues. At dinner, Mary took ‘a pound of costly perfume, made of pure nard, anointed Jesus’ feet and wiped them with her hair’.

We read in the Bible that Kings and Priests were anointed with oil on the head until the oil would run down the beard.

But for Jesus, it was his feet; The feet that took him around Galilee, and brought him to Jerusalem.; The feet that would take him to his trial, and to his crucifixion.

But what a waste, comments Judas, the keeper of the purse. That money that perfume cost could provide food for many people. (It seems we always have the poor.. the greedy and the critics with us.)

“Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial.”

Was Jesus really aware of what was to happen to him in the next few days? Or did he just feel his soul within him yearning for God, as the deer longs for the water-brooks?

Did the perfume that Mary poured on his feet provide strength for Jesus to go forth? Did this action water any part of his soul that was beginning to dry up like a desert?

Did Jesus feel that the journey would never end, that it would just go on and on?

We can not know what Jesus knew or felt. But as we come toward the end of Lent, we can count the days until it is over.. only 13 more days of waiting, remembering, staying in the desert; ‘living through the passion’, yet knowing Jesus’ resurrection will come. God, once again will do a new thing.. Once again we can celebrate. Once again sing Alleluia.

But for now, for the next 13 days, as we may call out to God, asking as the psalmist did..
“Why have you forgotten me? And why do I go so heavily while the enemy oppresses me?”

Isaiah tells us that God promises ‘a new thing,’ and ‘now it is springs forth, do you not perceive it?’

O my soul “Put your trust in God; for I will yet give thanks to him, who is the help of my countenance, and my God”. AMEN