

The Old Testament: Isaiah 43:16-21

Reader: A Reading from the Book of Isaiah.

Thus says the Lord, who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters, who brings out chariot and horse, army and warrior; they lie down, they cannot rise, they are extinguished, quenched like a wick: “Do not remember the 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. 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, the people whom I formed for myself so that they might declare my praise.”

Reader: The Word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

The Epistle: Philippians 3:4b-14

Reader: A Reading from the Letter of Paul to the Philippians.

If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: 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; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. 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 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, the righteousness from God based on faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead. Not 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. Beloved, 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, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

Reader: The Word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

The Holy Gospel: John 12:1-8

Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. Mary 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. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" (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.) Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."

Psalm 126

- 1 When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, *
then were we like those who dream.
- 2 Then was our mouth filled with laughter, *
and our tongue with shouts of joy.
- 3 Then they said among the nations, *
“The Lord has done great things for them.”
- 4 The Lord has done great things for us, *
and we are glad indeed.
- 5 Restore our fortunes, O Lord, *
like the watercourses of the Negev.
- 6 Those who sowed with tears *
will reap with songs of joy.
- 7 Those who go out weeping, carrying the seed, *
will come again with joy, shouldering their sheaves.

Welcome to our church. Each of the Lenten Sundays stresses one of the events in the Old Testament history of Salvation. For us, these events foreshadow the meaning of Christ's death and resurrection and our incorporation into him in Holy Baptism.

The two greatest events in Israel's salvation history were the Exodus/Passover in the time of Moses and Israel's return from exile in Babylon to the land of promise in the sixth century B.C. Today we hear from Isaiah a reflection upon that return which transforms it into the sign that still to come. God's plan is an even greater act of salvation—something entirely new. It is that new action by God which we celebrate in this season and especially in Holy Week and Easter.

Today's gospel reading is the story of a woman who expressed her devotion to Jesus by anointing his feet with costly perfume. While Judas complained about her extravagant action, Jesus saw it as a sign of his coming death and burial. The gospel writer discounts the complaint that the money could have been given to the poor. We are reminded that to make our Lord our greatest value is essential to our role as the people of God.

In the second reading, Paul testifies that his life is lived in Christ. This is not simply a metaphor. In baptism, we have been made part of Jesus' dying and rising, which is renewed in the Eucharist.

We are nearing Holy Week, when we enter into an intense period of rediscovering our identity as people who are in Christ and in whom God has performed the ultimate act of salvation. The restoration of all people to their true homeland with God will end the exile from God created by our disobedience.

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