

Sunday, April 6, 2025 Lent 5

Isaiah 43:16-21; Psalm 126; Philippians 3:4b-14;

John 12:1-8 (Matthew 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-11; Luke 7:36-50)

"Let's Keeping Going" Something to show for our lives and to keep us going.

We go forward into each morning. We cannot go back to enjoy what we think was good about the past, or to fix what we think was wrong. We cannot live a day yet to come. Being alive means being alive now. The gift that God gives us is life now.

Israel went through many wonderful and difficult experiences. Our texts from Isaiah 43 and Psalm 126 use the imagery of water to describe what God has done.

Isaiah 43 speaks of water being the means for God's judgment and protection. God drowned the Egyptian army in the torrents of the Red Sea. Then the lack of water was a problem in the desert and God made a fresh source of water for the Israelites in the desert. (Is 43:16-21)

The Israelites who are climbing to Jerusalem for a festival (Ascents) are filled with joy at a good harvest. They remember when they were given water in the desert. Water is now the means for their food. Manna stopped and they were able to plant and harvest yearly. (Psalm 126)

Each of the Gospels tell the story of a woman anointing Jesus' feet with costly nard, made from the hairy root of nard, spikenard, from the mountains of northern India (Newman & Niida, p.388). Internet sites describe the fragrance of spikenard as "musty, musky" (the perfumechronicles.com nard) or "Intense balsamic notes, warm...in relation to the odour of humus" (lavoieparfume.com) Each of the Gospels tells the story with a little different focus.

Judas complains because he wanted to skim the cash offering of 300 days laborer's wages. (PA minimum hourly wage \$7.25 X 8 = \$58 daily X 300 days = \$17,400) Jesus says you just can't help yourself when you know you are forgiven something that has been crushing you.

The woman who has been forgiven moved into her new life by using all her savings for the future on love for Christ. Jesus faces death and says she prepares his body for burial next week.

In the meantime, Judas brought up the needs of the poor and the duty to give alms. Jesus affirmed the need to share with those in need, and said that the disciples are welcome to share with others anytime, as those needs are ongoing.

Judas in fact had sticky fingers and felt he deserved a cut of the money coming through the common purse. This is a problem for any charity funds, isn't it?

This seems very extravagant in uncertain economic times. This gift seems very foolish for a person who was probably needy herself. The woman may not have had a means of supporting herself in the future if she has been working the streets and now left that life. Jesus receives her tearful and joyous thanksgiving. Jesus lives in that moment with her. "But what about tomorrow?" we say to her worriedly. "How will you live?" Jesus will live in the moment with

her going forward. Just as the Israelites moved through deliverance to growing their own food, so shall this woman. (John 12:1-8)

Finally, our friend, our mentor, who expresses our deepest longings and fears about being a follower of Christ, Paul, speaks to new life in the Philippians passage.

He speaks of high value, like the spikenard. It is life itself, not the circumstances of our birth or social and economic status, that is precious. And life, in the Bible, is life with God in peace, love and joy. However miserable you may think you are, if you are living with Christ in the Kingdom of God, you are living the highest life. Paul has experienced both sides of status.

It's not credentials or achievements that motivate a person who knows Christ. Sharing Christ's sufferings by becoming like Him in His death, we share His resurrection. In losing everything, we reach the goal of being called with Christ into God's presence. (Philippians 3:4b-14)

This was the national experience of Israel that is the experience of those who trust in Christ, individually but especially as a congregation: Being in bondage, being delivered, coming through the desert without the ability or means to focus our lives or have goals, or meet our own needs, being lead into a land where the manna stops and we actually want to live together, each doing their part.

Even in our own land, the harvest is always from God, because we can't control the rain and weather and natural disasters nor eliminate human error or folly in the community. The blessings of the Kingdom of God, while we are still on earth, are not because we are special, better than other communities, have a store of righteousness from the past, or now are deeper or more faithful than others.

It is in the suffering of Christ that we come to know the resurrection. We cannot justify ourselves by meticulously recounting the sins and mistakes we have committed. Repentance is moving away from judging ourselves and living in God's presence, with Christ who is the fullest expression of God.

Christians have a bad track record of handling power over the weak, money, status, praise, sex, earthly authority. We might think we need more power to handle and eliminate all the evil in the world, but in power we become the evil. Whatever gains I had, were loss, Paul says. I'm not trying to achieve righteousness, but life that has already begun now and will continue through death. God is calling us forward, to live.

Let's keep going, not because we're special or deserve it, but because we are God's and God gave us the wonderful gift of life today.

## Resources

Martin, Ralph. Philippians. New Century Bible Commentary Series, Eerdmans, 1976

Newman, Barclay M. and Eugene A. Niida. A Translator's Handbook on the Gospel of John. United Bible Societies, 1980.