

Fifth Sunday in Lent
Year C

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

There is something about the human race that we seem to be drawn back into the past. In good times and bad, we look to what has gone before. In good times, we reflect on the glories of bygone years, and in bad times, we look to see how we might have handled a similar situation in years gone by. Rarely do we look to the future to see how we might prepare for what lies ahead. This is nothing new in the history of humanity.

Whether it is the Israelites of old, the early Christians, or us today, we reminisce about the past. Isaiah tells the Israelites not to focus on the past - on the Exodus out of Egypt - but on the new exodus out of exile back into the land promised to their forefathers. "Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old." The likely response from any good practicing Jew would be, "God told us to remember the Passover and the wandering in the wilderness." The problem with that approach, according to Isaiah, is that they will miss out on the promises God has for their generation. God is asking them to look back to Genesis and remember that this same God who made them is now asking them to look forward to a new beginning.

In the Gospel reading, Mary is not looking at the past, but understands there is about to be a new beginning for the followers of Jesus. At the same time, Judas is looking at the past and the conditions that surround the followers of Jesus at the moment. Jesus has to remind the disciples that the poor will always be with them - the plight of the people of the world will continue - but that Mary is right in expecting something new.

Paul is even more explicit. He has much in his past for which to be proud. He was raised in privilege, trained with the best teachers, and diligent in his pursuit of pure Judaism. However, the opportunity that has been placed before him - the chance to usher in a new approach to God - makes all of his past seem worthless.

Isaiah quotes God as saying, "I am about to do a new thing." For the Israelites of the exile, it was an opportunity to return to their homeland. For Mary, it was the death of Jesus and the promise of new life through Him. For Paul, it was the chance to spread the Good News of the resurrection of Jesus and the fast approaching end of the age. What about for us?

All our lives we have heard these same messages. We have grown up with the stories of the Exodus, the return from exile of the Israelites, death and resurrection of Jesus, and the expectation of the end of the age. Is there something in Isaiah's message for us? Is God about to do a new thing in our midst?

A few weeks ago, I strayed from what I had written for a sermon and spoke from my heart that I felt God had something new for us. I don't know what that is, but I feel we are on the precipice

of something new. In the past, we seem to have become a stepping stone, a nursery for families to get acquainted with the Episcopal Church and then move to another congregation that could supply their needs more fully. While this can be frustrating as we see people come and go, we know that they have grown spiritually in their new settings.

Now, I believe it is our turn. God has something new for us. We have been led to this larger location for a reason. I believe we are starting to see signs of new growth coming to St. Matt's. It won't happen overnight and may be hard to discern in the early stages, but God is calling us into a new work in this area. Like Isaiah, I bid you not to look to the past actions of God, but to the future. We need to be bold, like Mary, and pour the expensive perfume out with abandon. And, like Paul, we need to throw off the privileges of our past experiences and find the difficult work which lays ahead. Paul did not experience abundance of joy in all that he did, but went through many trials and tribulations. We have been through some difficult times and may experience a bit more before we come to know all that God has for us, but I firmly believe that God is opening a new door for us and is about to do a new thing here in St. Matt's. Let us be open to that possibility.