

isaiah 43:16-21

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.

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 give 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."

Sermon

Did you see the flowers as you drove in today? Maybe you saw some around your house, or maybe along the road as you headed to church, or maybe you noticed those that were at the corner of the church property. There is always something amazing, holy, joyful about seeing the first flowers of the spring. They are a reminder of the new life that God promises, the something new that God is all about - life, beauty, fragrance, promised futures, pasts that come back around, and presents that call us to be present. I don't know about you, but I was thankful to see those first flowers - Lent is a long six weeks, with a journey that is difficult both spiritually and physically. And the journey is not over, but today we can see the first flowers of new life as a foretaste of the abundant life that is about to spring forth.

Jesus' lenten story is also coming toward its end. In John's gospel, the story of Jesus with Mary anointing his feet directly precedes the triumphal entry into Jerusalem. But before he gets there, Jesus first stops to eat with friends. And there was Lazarus, the friend whom Jesus raised from the dead. And there was Martha, in the kitchen as she always was. And there was Mary, causing a scene, pouring out expensive perfume upon Jesus' feet and wiping them with her hair. Scandal, that Jesus would allow a woman to touch his feet. Scandal, that Mary would wear her hair unbound in the style of a woman of the street. Scandal, that so much money would be wasted upon what seemed to be a pointless ritual or a luxury for the rich.

Judas cannot handle it. "I thought we were all about helping the poor, that nard could have been sold 300 days wages, that is more than \$30,000! That could be used to stock the shelves of a food pantry for half a year. That is enough to build 5 water pumps that would give clean, fresh water for five villages in Africa. That is enough to make a life changing difference in families both near and far. Just imagine what we could do, how we could help with \$30,000. And, according to the other gospels, Judas was not alone in this thought, but all the disciples agreed with his conclusions.

But Jesus said, "You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."

The politician was asked, "Why do you support the bill that cuts funding for SNAP that helps feed the poor in our country?" The politician replies, "Jesus said, 'You will always have the poor with you.' and we can't afford to do everything."

The reporter/commentator asked the activist, "Tell me, why are you protesting? What do you hope to get from this?" The activist replies, "We want to raise the consciousness of the plight of the poor. To raise the need for our nation to take care of the least among us." The commentator replied back, "But the poor will always be with us!"

A church received a large bequest after a long time member of passed away. The session of the church began to deliberate on what they might do. The head of the Buildings and Grounds team spoke up, "We need to improve the look of our sanctuary and our entrance. With that kind of money, we could make a beautiful new door way

and welcome area and get brand new furniture for the chancel and choir.” The mission team leader said, “But what about missions, we have cut back on our mission giving for the past three years when the money was tight.” “But the poor will always be with us and if we make ourselves more attractive then hopefully we can afford more mission in the future.”

Why would Jesus say such a thing? Was Jesus wanting his disciples to ignore the plight of the poor or was there something more? It might help for us to understand that Jesus didn't just say these words off the cuff, but that he was eluding to something in Hebrew law.

What Jesus was eluding to... Deuteronomy 15:10-11 Give liberally and be ungrudging when you do so, for on this account the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake. Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you, “Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land.”

Maybe this was not a statement of impossibility or of leaving the poor behind - something that would seem to go against Jesus' very ministry. Maybe instead it was a confirmation that “the poor will always have you with them”. That our calling will always be to stand with the poor, to serve the oppressed, to reach out to the untouchables in our world. And maybe, just maybe, that is what Mary was preparing Jesus for - through burial, to awaken the invisible and to raise up the poor. “The poor will always be with you” “you will always be with the poor.” Amen