

Sermon - 04/03/2022
Ps 126; Is 43:16-21; Phil 3:4-1; Jn 12:1-8
The Goal > Becoming His

Our psalm for today references the exile in Babylon. It celebrates return – and the renewed joy of going up to the temple to worship God. This traveling theme is added to the theme of the Exodus out of Egypt when God parted the Red Sea and the whole nation crossed over on dry ground – looking back to see Pharaoh’s chariots and soldiers swallowed up by the rushing water returning to its natural state. They were headed for the Promised Land. The overarching theme is God’s abundant grace and deliverance out of our prison of sin.

You and I are walking to Jerusalem with Jesus and His disciples. We may well remember the two great times of deliverance God gave to His people. We pray as we head for Jerusalem (figuratively) that we will come out of our own slavery and bondage and exile and receive the promised New Life. Christ is enthroned in heavenly places – and yet He walks beside us through our struggles and our joys. He is exalted and He is the ever-present Shepherd of our soul. His feet get as dusty as ours do.

This past week I thought again of Mother Theresa and her ministry in Calcutta, India. Saint Theresa passed away the year I headed out to study for the ministry (1997). She was an effective worker with the destitute and diseased street people of Calcutta. Even as she begged for and received the funds to build and expand Missionaries of Charity centers, she was criticized for not offering state of the art medical treatment for those her team picked up out of the gutter and brought back. She worked only to offer clean conditions, nourishing food and comfort to those dying from HIV-AIDS, leprosy and other diseases. Her critics claimed she and her order were not doing enough.

The question is: Whether Jesus-followers are to live with poor folks and offer spiritual comfort – or build modern medical facilities in order to conquer disease. Is there a moral imperative demanding one or the other? Let’s see if the Scriptures help us answer this today.

The Prophet Isaiah declares that God is about to do a new thing. If water means life instead of death in the desert; then, God is going to give spiritual water that enables His people to **declare God’s praise**. (Is 43:21) Is that all? Is that not enough? This means apart from the mighty acts of deliverance God has already performed for His people (the Exodus out of Egypt and the restoration of the temple and the nation after the Babylonian exile) – He is about to pour out the water of Life more abundantly. He accomplishes this by sending His Messiah. Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

Consider Saul of Tarsus. He was building a brilliant career. He came to Jerusalem to study with the renown Gamaliel. Only the best teachers, only leadership at the temple. Only the best was good enough. He describes himself in his letter to the church at Philippi: zealous for God, attacking this blasphemous cult known as The Way and most of all carefully and completely keeping the Law of Moses. He must have been a tiresome fellow in those days. Can anybody say “holier-than-thou”? He had lofty goals that brought him glory.

He speaks of all this in the past tense. Here’s why: God knocked Saul off his high-horse. God struck him blind, so he had to be led by the hand into Damascus. He was healed and then baptized by a true servant of the Lord Jesus Christ named Ananias. After that encounter with the living God, Saul renamed himself Paul, and a whole new chapter of his life began. Paul says, “For His (Jesus’) 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.” (Phil 3:8-9)

I ask you this morning: Is pure devotion to God enough? It is a huge question in the church. It can be a point of controversy – and controversy is fine. It can also become a point of division and even intolerance – and that is not fine. Beware of religion that does not permit you to think and let think. If pure devotion is not enough, what must be added to devotion to make it complete? I ask you – must the hospice of the Missionaries of Charity become the Mayo Clinic? Or is the work of offering comfort and peace a true and whole calling of Christ?

(Continued on next page.)

Mary of Bethany is passionate in her devotion and worship of the Lord Jesus. She lived at the same time in the same space. You and I cannot literally touch our Savior's feet today. We may kneel before Him, pray to Him, sing to Him and praise Him. Mary humbles herself without embarrassment or shame. She worships Jesus passionately. Imagine you are in the room. Where are you? Are you shocked at Mary's actions? Outraged? Embarrassed? Judas seems to be indignant. Do you put yourself in Martha's place? Lazarus? Or Mary kneeling at Jesus' feet?

Jesus speaks the prophetic truth. Mary is anointing her Lord for burial. In the Bible, anointing is for kings at the start of their reign. Anointing is also for healing the sick. And the dead are anointed before being laid in the grave. Jesus quotes Deuteronomy:

For the poor will never cease from the land; therefore I command you, saying, 'You shall open your hand wide to your brother (*and sister*), to your poor and your needy, in your land.' (Dt 15:11)

Jesus belongs to you and you belong to Him.
It is enough. Amen.