

Scripture Readings and Sermon

April 7, 2019 by Rev. Mark Brechin

Commentary on Isaiah 43:16-21 (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

Scholars say that in this passage God is giving the people a new story. Where they once focused on the Exodus from Egypt, they are now to focus on the return from the Babylonian captivity. This is why it says, "Do not remember the former things". Doing a word search on both the Hebrew and the Greek word used for "new", however, points to something more than just a new story. The Hebrew word used for "new" is also found in Isaiah 65:17 (a new heaven and earth), Jeremiah 31:31 (a new covenant), and in Ezekiel 11:19, 18:31, and 36:26 (a new heart and a new spirit). God is not just changing the story but God is changing the very nature of God's relationship with humanity. The Greek word for "new" is used in Isaiah 42:9 and 48:6 as well as 2 Corinthians 5:17 (new creation in Christ) and Revelation 21:5 (making all things new). It is from the section in Isaiah 42:9 that it says "a light to the Gentiles" and "open blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners". The passage from Isaiah 48:6 reference hidden things being revealed. When all of these references are considered together, what God is promising to do is more than change the story for a people but change humanities understanding of itself and its relationship with God.

Commentary on Philippians 3:4b-14 (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

Immediately before this passage, Paul warns the Philippians to beware of "evil worker" or those who would mislead them. Who these evil workers might be can be gleaned from this passage. These workers have obviously used their Jewish piety as their credential for leading the people. Paul's response is to provide his own impressive resume. The workers have also most likely been preaching that being a pious Jew is essential to being a good Christian. Paul responds by saying that he views all his piety as "loss" or "rubbish". Paul argues that it is not our righteousness but the righteousness of Christ that saves us which can only come through faith. Finally, these workers have probably argued that through their pious righteousness, they have achieved salvation. The so called "once save, always saved". Paul, however, responds that faith is not a one time event but something one has to cling to everyday as the "press on" in their daily life in Christ.

Commentary on John 12:1-8 (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

There are a number of characters to focus on in this story. The story takes place in the home of Lazarus. The Gospel of John is the only Gospel to mention the person of Lazarus. In Luke, Lazarus is the name of a poor person in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. In John's gospel of miracles, Lazarus is not only foreshadows the resurrection but also the plotting of the chief priests (12:10). Mary and Martha, who first appear in John at Lazarus' resurrection, are also present. In Luke's story of Mary and Martha (10:38-41), the focus is on Martha's complaint about how she was doing all the work serving. In John, Martha is mentioned serving but the focus is on what Mary is doing at his feet. Mary is not just listening to Jesus but is anointing him with funeral oil foreshadowing the fact that they would have no time after his death to prepare the body because of the Sabbath. The final character is Judas. For the synoptic gospels, Judas began to betray Jesus when they entered Jerusalem and in Matthew will eventually hang himself because of that betrayal. For John, however, Judas is named as "a devil" after the feeding of the five thousand in Galilee. (John 6:70-71) It is in this passage that John indicates why Judas is called "a devil" and betrays Jesus. Ultimately, according to John, Judas loved money more than God for he was "a thief". Together, all of these characters set the stage for the beginning of Holy Week.

Sermon Summary (*Youtube [Sermon Video](#)*)

Like the story in Luke, the scene described in John has Martha serving and Mary at Jesus' feet. In John, however, it is not Martha that is complaining but Judas. While Martha says that was concerned about Mary wasting her time, Judas says that Mary is wasting money by anointing Jesus with precious oil. John indicates that Judas is not concerned with money for the poor but rather money for himself. Jesus response to Judas is very similar to his response to Martha. To Martha, Jesus says that she needs to reassess her priorities. Work and chores will always be there but Mary, by choosing to focus on Jesus while he is there, has chosen the one thing necessary. Jesus responds to Judas by saying that the poor will always be with us but Jesus will only be with them for a short time longer. Judas needs to shift his priorities before his priorities lead him down a path of destruction.

What Judas needs is a paradigm shift in thinking. A paradigm shift is defined as a fundamental change in approach or underlying assumptions. Jesus is calling Judas to stop thinking in worldly terms and start thinking in spiritual terms. In order to make this shift, an individual must be willing to let go of all their past assumptions. This is what God was telling the Israelites to do in Isaiah. They needed to forget the old deliverance story of Exodus and the Red Sea and prepare themselves for a "new" story of deliverance through the desert. They must leave behind the the old so that they can listen for what God is doing now.

Confronted with Jewish converts to Christianity that where telling the church in Philippi to take up Jewish traditions, Paul responds by urging the Philippians to leave the old ways behind. Using himself as an example, Paul argues that in Christ we are made new. Nothing in the past can produce righteousness. It is only by letting go of our old need to control that we can fully trust in Christ. Therefore, leaving behind the past, we must strive to follow Christ into a new future.