

Pastor Roy's sermon from March 13, 2016 (5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent)

In this sermon, I'm inviting us all to pray. Not for something concrete, but that we might open ourselves to God's future. So when you feel your anxiety rising in this sermon, remember, I'm only asking you to pray. To listen to God. To ask God, What's next? What can I do? And listen some more.

We see in Isaiah 43 that the truth of God's mercy and creative power is revealed as much in the Hebrew Bible as it is in the Greek New Testament: **"Look, I am doing something new, now it emerges, can you not see it? Yes, I am making a road in the desert and rivers in wastelands."** Roads and water in Isaiah's time are all about a healthy economy and inviting all to the table of plenty.

Isaiah sees a world of peace rather than a world of violence, power, and control. Armies, soldiers, and weapons are not as powerful as we think. Isaiah is not calling for a revolution. No the revolution is in the hands of God and it has already happened. Water. Work. Community. Faith. Peace. We don't have to make it happen, we simply live into this God life as it springs forth all around us.

Psalm 126. We sow with tears, we will reap with joy! Sowing seeds is difficult. It requires faith. Planting onions. 4 months. Less faith. Planting a twig with roots? A life time. More faith. What about planting seeds for people? We rarely see the seeds sprout. Family yes. Neighbors not so much. There is no immediate reward besides the joy flowing from faith's promise.

The Psalmist's prayer is that Yahweh will bring captives home, not a trickle, but a flood torrent of freedom. This is about community restored. This is about reconciliation. Faith restored, not in religion, but in God's mercy and in our mercy. Religion is about rules and traditions. Faith is about a living, breathing trust and hope.

We needn't fear getting faith wrong, the Creating Redeemer/Sustainer will always get it right. If we hold our faith with open hands, we will not go astray. But tight fist ed clinging to religious practices will always disappoint and bring grief. Isaiah and the psalmist are talking about faith. I believe Martin Luther and the saints at their best, at their most essential, these were about faith. Trust, clinging, hopeful, joy even in tears.

When Mary anoints Jesus' feet and wipes them with her hair. Why would she do that? Seriously awkward moment! She believed in Jesus. It wasn't a head thing. Like "I believe this about Jesus, I believe this about God." She let it all go for Jesus. She didn't care that it was socially inappropriate to let down her hair and touch Jesus like that. It was like David dancing half or totally naked in the street because he so loved God and was celebrating the return of the ark of the covenant to the tabernacle. These saints are passionate about God and everything nothing else really mattered that much.

Mary seizes the moment to show gratitude and affection and joy. She reveals her cards, her priorities, her commitments. With this act, she throws in her lot with Jesus. Whatever he teaches. Whatever he does. Whoever he is. She is on board. She has listened. She has made a decision.

Either Judas didn't get it? Or he did and needed a distraction before the question came to the rest of him. Where do your final loyalties lie? Are you committed to the way of Jesus? Are you willing to let it all go?

What about you and me? Are we ready for something new? Are we ready to be the church that the world out there needs us to be? Are we ready to love more than just the people that love us? Are we ready to take a chance for Jesus?

We are in an age in which going to church on Sunday morning is not enough for the church to go on. There must be more to our gathering than Sunday morning, because the vast majority of folks under 40 will not come to church on Sunday morning. We keep expecting them to change, but they will not. And even if they did, their hearts would not be in it. Faith is about reaching out to people where they are! We must change something if we would follow the example of Mary, and Isaiah and the Psalmist. This is a great challenge to the church today.

We are being called to pour out the precious oil of our lives, the oil of our time, the oil of our limited resources not for buildings, but for people who need someone to care, to love, to find meaning and hope and peace. Today, for the most part, these relationships will not happen in our church buildings. These relationships will happen in coffee shops and in our homes.

This is not the stuff of convenience and tidy comfort zones. This is the stuff of spiritual compassion for the sake of others and the practice of our gifts, we all have opportunity.

What can we do to pour out the oil of our dedication to the way of Christ? Remember what I said earlier?

Pray. We must start with prayer. Now, that's all we can do. As we pray, the path will become more evident. But only if we are serious. If we are content with the declining of the practices of our congregations which are no longer relevant to most people today, then we have a very limited time left before all of us have to go elsewhere or give up the practice of gathering for encouragement and mutual support.

Please pray. Just pray. I believe the Spirit will lead us to pour out the oil of our lives on behalf of all creation. Though we don't know what it looks like, we are engaged in the adventure of faith, and perhaps the adventure of a life time. Please pray. Don't worry. Just pray and know that we are all in this together. God is with us. Thanks be to God. Amen.