

SERMON 29Mar 2020 5 Lent

OT: Ezek 37:1-14 Psalm 130:1-7

NT: Rom 8:6-11 Gospel: John 12:1-8

Yr, A

May the words of my mouth and the meditations
of my heart always be acceptable in thy sight, O'
Lord my strength and my redeemer. Amen.

On this the 5th Sunday in Lent we gather much
as the early believers did. We are not afraid of
Roman troops breaking into the service and arresting
every
one; but we are concerned with a virus that if
present could sicken and decimate our flock.
Because this is a new problem without a full

background of information about the disease it's prevention, progression in the body, and various treatments for those who become infected.

These factors have led some individuals to become fearful; and the advice to avoid. others and stay in place have resulted in some hoarding and other strange behaviors. All of us have had our lives effected and have had to change our daily routines.

Today in the collect we recognize that only God has the power to bring order into our unruly wills and sinful lives. Our free will is such that it routinely leads us astray while at the same time providing us with supposed solid reasons as to why we should act in this way. We ask God to help us love his

commands and to desire to accept and follow his teachings. Also, that we may listen to the instructions of our medical and governmental officials as they learn more in dealing with this new pandemic.

We, furthermore, ask that these things be written on our hearts so that the execution of these desires is automatic for us and that we may know the true joy that can only be found in God.

The Epistle reminds us that it matters not if we gain the world for everything can be lost in a flash when we die. All our efforts, schemes, and plans to

win what appears to be important in this life mean nothing when compared to the rewards that Christ has awaiting his faithful followers. How often do we still allow arguments about practicality, which are self-justifying, like the complaint of Judas to take us away from the center of our faith, avoiding true commitment, love and loyalty? Despite all the arguments to the contrary, putting Christ first with true devotion, honoring him in his death and resurrection is the way we need to learn to think.

Service to people in need is something we must do and in doing so we serve him; but, no amount of good works can give us that certainty of salvation that comes with faith in Jesus, the Christ, the

anointed one.

In the Gospel, John provides the story of Mary's anointing of Jesus' feet which fore shadows Jesus' washing the feet of his disciples at the Last Supper as an example of servant ministry. It is particularly significant that John brackets the story of Mary's sign of love, not only with the threat of death, but with a sign of the resurrection in the person of Lazarus who was at the dinner table with him, who people came to see, and who the chief priests planned to kill. They came to see Lazarus, and the authorities then planned to kill him because Jesus had raised him from the dead, a sign of the victory he was shortly to win for all.

The story of the anointing of Jesus had great significance for the early church, because it is included in all four of the Gospels. However, some of that meaning has been lost and there are several differences in the specific details among the four accounts, including where and when the anointing took place and the woman's identity. However, for today we will concentrate on John's description.

Mary's act of anointing was radical in that it was an action that was out of place for woman to do such an act of love in public in the presence of a group of men, the disciples. The traditions of the times said that Mary should have been in the kitchen with Martha helping to prepare the meal. The shear

excess of the use and gift of nard is enough to bring people up short to a stop. A pound of nard cost approximately a year's worth of salary. Yet Mary freely and gladly gave this to Jesus.

Have you ever given such a gift to someone you love? In so doing Mary was adding a new dimension to the equation for the relationship between Jesus and his followers and caused even more consternation for the disciples in their efforts to understand Jesus, his teachings and actions. Judas is the only disciple who is sighted as objecting to this lavish gift, but it is also pointed out that he had ulterior motives when it came to the monies that the disciples used. Jesus speaks not in terms of conquest, but in terms of sacrifice and

death. He talks in terms of love and forgiveness. He turned the Jews' ideas upside down; until we understand how He turned a dream of conquest into a vision of the Cross. No wonder the Jews did not understand Him; the tragedy is that they refused to understand Him.

Jesus used the amazing paradox to teach three things, which are all variations of one central truth, and which are all at the heart of the Christian faith and life. (1) He was saying that only by death comes life. That a grain of wheat was ineffective and unfruitful so long as it was preserved in safety and security. It was only when it is thrown onto the cold ground, and

buried there as if in a tomb, that it bore fruit. It was by the death of martyrs that the church grew. It was because they died that the church became the living church. It is always because men have been prepared to die that the great things have lived. By the death of personal desire and personal ambition a man becomes a servant of God. (2) Jesus was saying that only by spending life do we retain life. Men who are driven by the ambition of safety and security of their lives are the ones who in the end will surely lose their life. No doubt, those who hoard and husband their lives will exist longer – but they will never live at all. The world owes everything to people who recklessly spent their strength and gave themselves to God. (3)

Jesus' third point was that only by service comes greatness. The people whom the world remembers with love are the people who serve others. This is exemplified by the story of the old woman who had spent her life in service to others, but now that she was old she couldn't do much of anything except that she put a sign in her home's window that said "If you need help, knock here." This is truly the Christian attitude toward our fellow man. There are so many people today who are in life and in work and in business for nothing else than for that which they can get out of it. They may well become rich, but one thing is certain – they will never be loved, and love is the true wealth of life.

Jesus came to the Jews with a new view of life. They looked on glory as conquest, the acquisition of power, the right to rule. He looked on glory as a cross. He taught men that only by death comes life; that only by spending life do we retain life; that only by service comes greatness. And the extraordinary thing is that when we come to think of it, the paradox of Christ is nothing other than the truth of common sense.

Fffff7This brings us back to the idea that Lent is a time for examination of our relationship with God and others. I fervently pray that you will take the time to reflect on where God is in your life and that as you prepare for Palm Sunday next week that you

will find the true meaning and joy that God has for
you.

I also pray that each of us gains a new insight into
Lent and the Easter season that we are about to enter.

Or as a wise priest taught me may we remember
who we are and whose we are. Amen.