

#18 15-16
Psalm 126
Philippians 3:4b-14
John 12:1-8
Isaiah 43:16-21

Spring Forth in Faith

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.

I love it when synchronicity occurs between the scripture from the liturgical cycle and something in our human world! Today being the day when we had set our clocks forward an hour, and have called it "Spring Forward!" in contrast to the when our clocks are set back an hour in the Fall and we call it "Fall back" ~ and in the scripture I just read, there is a line which says, "I am about to do a new thing; now it *springs forth*, do you not perceive it?" In our Epistle, Peter "*press[es] on*" . . . as well as, "forget[s] what lies behind and *strain[s] forward* to what lies ahead." And in the Gospel, Jesus is quoted as making reference to the future, ". . . but you do not always have me." And a quote not from today's scripture lesson, but very relevant, from Luke 9, where the mission of the Disciples was chronicled, verse 62: "Jesus said to him, 'No one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.'"

In our church life, we are anticipating some changes from the pending visit from Roger McKinney, our assessor from Hope Partnership, for what he called "New Beginnings". So the anticipation of Spring, and Easter and looking forward for the Kingdom of God to be revealed to us here, all makes this an exciting day to be in church!

Yesterday, I was blessed to be invited to attend someone's Bar Mitzvah. The third Mitzvah I've attended and each time I feel like I have breathtaking revelations about faith. So much of what is sung, said, done in their over 2 hour service is consistent, pure praise of God. Pronouncements of how good and true and personal God is to those who believe in God! It is like a mantra and it would be hard to affirm anything for that long and not leave the experience being assured of the fact! God is good, God loves us, and let us never doubt that! But another of my aha moments came from the annotations in their Torah about the texts the Bar Mitzvah man, Joey, was reading! The first section of his readings was about the criterion for the Tabernacle which carried the Arch of the covenant - the stones which had the 10 commandments on them. The second reading was about the criterion for the place in the temple where this Tabernacle was to be placed inside Solomon's Temple. And the annotations discussed how symbolic this was.

The Tabernacle was designed to be carried around with the Jews as they roamed around, wandering around, searching for the promised land that God had said they would finally receive. They went from wandering nomads, to salves, to wandering nomads again, until they finally settled in their holy land, and finally, Solomon was building the house for God to live in, for the sacred stones to be secure in! A central place for worship!

And yet, the transportable tabernacle was never replaced. This central Temple gave a place for the movable container to rest, but the covenant was never removed and made permanent. And this was said to have been symbolic of Faith - how there is a stability of our faith, as symbolized by this Temple, and at the same time there is a flexibility, a fluidness about faith that cannot be contained in one place.

So when the faith moved into a person, that of Jesus, and then moved even or elusively into the Holy Spirit! Imagine how insecure that would make people. So we have our various denominations, and buildings all pronouncing what it means to be faithful, and our denomination has espoused, "in essentials, unity, in non essentials, diversity."

If there is anything we are sure of in this world, it is that change happens. And with that truth often comes 2 sides of the coin - fear and gratefulness! Questions arise - Can we control the changes that happen? Can we adapt to them? Because changes happen, and sometimes we want to stop them from happening desperately. And our sermon text reminded us, "Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old."

The Gospel for today is a foretelling of a huge change in the lives of the followers of Jesus. They are busy learning and healing and teaching and doing all the things Jesus asks them to do. They have changed so much of their lives already! Left professions and hometowns to wander around with this guy! They should be used to change by now . . . and yet, in this example we have Judas wanting to hang on to the concept of saving money, not ready to let go and trust the flexibility that a life in trust with the living God brings.

And Jesus shakes the relative security of the group when he brings up his coming death. These people gave up their secure homes - their Temples so to speak, to travel around with the Tabernacle of God in the form of this man, Jesus Christ. And in him they found their faith, and their security, and he keeps letting them know that he won't be around forever. Creating a sense of vulnerability just when they were starting to feel a little cocky and sure of themselves!

This is the message for this week in Lent - let us watch ourselves, that we do not get too sure of ourselves and too secure on our Temples. For God is always calling us to step out of what we know, and in love and faith walk into the places of discomfort in order to serve God's creation. Going forth into the greater revelations of love that is always unfolding before us! Follow the path of hope and compassion, not looking backwards in fear and self protection.

For we are building on a centralized, secure Temple, an elusive ever growing, miraculous Spirit! We are growing in faith and in who we are as human, Godly, Beings!

In closing I would like to leave you with the miraculous image which Isaiah gave us. God said, "I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert." . . . Rivers in the desert? I seriously had never really thought about that until having to prepare for this sermon. I've been to the Grand canyon, so I knew there were rivers in the desert, but I never really thought about the dichotomy of those two concepts together.

According to one online source, in answering the question if there are rivers in the desert they wrote: "Yes, there are rivers in the desert. For example, Egypt's Nile River actually starts in wet regions outside of the desert and then flows right through the desert and out the other side. There are other rivers that only flow when it rains, which leaves a dry river bed most of the year except when it's raining or if there is ever heavy snowfall. These rivers are known as ephemeral rivers."

So, the image of God providing water in the desert is profound. What may seem illogical, or we may even take it for granted and not respect how amazing it is . . . like water in the desert . . . Isaiah is promising us that this is how God works! And I would like to think that our source for the water is coming from a region full and flowing with all we need, and will flow all year around, like the Colorado River, and not like an ephemeral river! What we have been promised is an abundance of all we need to live as Christ's followers now and into eternity! AMEN