

Sermon: Lent 5

The Rev. Mike Wernick

March 13, 2016

Year C

Isaiah 43:16-21

Psalm 126

Philippians 3:4b-14

John 12:1-8

You are sealed by the Holy Spirit in baptism... and marked as Christ's own forever...

When I heard those words at my baptism... twenty-five years ago... I got really choked up... it seemed as though a huge weight was lifted off my shoulders... and there was a change not in my attitude or perspective... but in my very being itself... and all that day... I carried with me the most incredible sense of peace and well being... I know what it is to make a mood of something... to contrive to feel something that isn't there... but this was something that descended upon me... it was being reborn from above... and the world was no longer on my shoulders... it wasn't all up to me anymore...

And I can hardly anoint anyone at baptism now... without that experience flooding back... it's something I want to dive into each time... not save it for later on... but wallow in it... as a former parishioner once said... it's like sloshing in grace...

When I was growing up... some of my parent's friends had a living room and a family room (or den)... the family room was where people sat and talked and watched TV... the living room was almost never used... it was kept aside for special events... or for special people... for some time... my grandparents had plastic slip covers on their living room furniture to protect it from wear and tear... and maybe from us grimy kids... but the plastic almost seemed to whisper... you'd better be sure you're worthy enough to sit here... this is a special place... in fact this room is reserved for special events and people who rarely come... or may never come...

In many of our closets... we have every day clothes and dress clothes... clothes we keep on hand for special occasions... clothes we wouldn't wear for yard work... though

Joel sometimes used to mow the lawn after work without changing... here in church... we have vessels reserved for Lent... and others to be used during the rest of the year... and at home we have every day plates and bowls... and some of us have china... for company or special holidays...

Some things get better with age... I guess.... some wines... whiskeys... but some things dry out... or spoil... some special things... if not used... will become unusable... and we know the line from Matthew... *do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust consume*... a reminder about the impermanence of things...

Every once in a while... you hear people ask... *what am I saving this for*... let's use the china... or [fill in the blank] every day... and I've told the story about the couple who gave away most of their possessions while they were still living... so they could enjoy the enjoyment they were creating in the recipients...

You are sealed by the Holy Spirit in baptism... and marked as Christ's own forever. In Matthew and Mark... the Gospel story of anointing takes place in Simon the Leper's home... and instead of Jesus' feet... his head is anointed... it recalls the anointing of David as King... but in today's story... it's at the home of Mary and Martha... and Lazarus... whom Jesus just raised from the dead...

Apparently... Jesus thought Mary worthy to sit at his feet... if this had been his home... he might have invited her to sit on the furniture... but to sit at his feet... the feet of a teacher... is probably better... and today... when Judas questioned Mary's use of the nard... Jesus said: *Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial*... but she didn't keep it... did she... Mary apparently said... *what am I saving this for*... this man... this Jesus has changed my life in ways I could never have imagined... I want him to know now that the lavish excess of this nard is nothing compared to what he has given me... I want to share my gifts with the living and not with the dead... and in testimony to that... the house was filled with the perfume...

Mary's hair was saturated with the fragrance... it was a very pleasant scent intended in the Jewish burial rite to offset the odor of death... remember... not very long ago... in Ch. 11:38 when Jesus asked for the stone to be rolled away... Martha said... *I wouldn't do that if I were you... my brother's been dead for four days and there's quite a stench...*

Pastor MaryAnn McKibben Dana wrote: when Lazarus was raised from the dead... his body had already begun to decompose... there's no reason to believe Jesus undid this... even his own resurrected body will bear visible wounds from the cross... so at this dinner party... there may be not one... but two death related smells... mingling in ways we can scarcely imagine... with our antiseptic treatment of death and dying... one can only imagine the hushed comments about cleanliness... but what matters here... is that Lazarus is not shunted off to the back room... he's here at table... someone who reminds us about the Jewish purity code... about washing pots and cups and hands... and death... is welcomed by Jesus...

Our Lenten journeys are almost over... and Good Friday is almost here... the anointing at our baptism is a foreshadowing of the anointing at our death... the death and resurrection of Jesus will wipe away all our sins... and will wipe away our deaths... but if we knew now... that someone we loved... would die in three days... how would *our* behavior change... what would we say to them... would those small things they do that irritate us... still irritate us... what would we forgive... [let go of] that which so far we have held on to... would we tell them how much they mean to us... let them know that our love for them far outweighs any hurt they have caused... because now... in these final days... we don't want there to be anything that can get in the way of relationship... we don't want there to be anything that can get in the way of love... and of the communion we'll share with them in the time that's left... we don't want there to be any regrets... about unsaid things...

The world is a hurting place... there are so many voices that reject... exclude... or diminish... but when it comes down to it... we all want to be loved... we all want the God who will come running down the road just to embrace us... to hold us once more... the God who will lavish the nard of forgiveness on us so that its fragrance overpowers any sin we have committed... or undo any lie we tell ourselves about how unlovable we are... we are sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked as Christ's own forever... it's as though God says... I've got limitless forgiveness... what am I saving it for... you are my special event... you are my special guest... you are worthy enough to sit on my plastic slipcovers... come do it now... slosh in my grace... and let me hold and forgive you until you melt into me and I melt into you... then you and I will be one... as Jesus and I are one... after all... this is what I intended from the very beginning... this is what resurrected life is all about... come... the Table is ready...

Mike+