

Happy Equinox everyone. The daffodils are coming up, the crocus is in bloom. Spring is officially here today. How lucky we are to live in a part of the world where you can tell that it is spring. We open our windows a bit and let in the fresh air. The main door of the church is open too. We can see the signs of spring.

In our readings from scripture today there are signs too. These signs are both hopeful and ominous at the same time. From Isaiah, “I am about to do a new thing, now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? God is saying, “You ain’t seen nothin’ yet”. But then, more worrisome from our psalm, “Those who sowed with tears will reap with songs of joy.” Will we have to sow with tears, we wonder?

Paul’s strong words echo in my head. *“But this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.”* (Phil 3:14) I’ll take a moment to say a little more about this passage in Paul’s letter to the Philippians. You know many of us come to Jesus, come to faith, because we’ve been beaten up enough by our circumstances and our lives. But not so with Paul. His life before Jesus found him was just fine, thank you very much. As he says in this passage, he was well educated, and he was a good Jew from a good tribe. He defended his faith by helping to rid it of heretics like Stephen, our first Christian martyr, and he kept the Law.

Never one to be shy and retiring he tells us he was blameless. Doubtless he means, by the letter of the law. Cash register honesty, or law keeping, we might call it. But then something happened to him on the road to Damascus and everything changed. Jesus came to him in some way and knocked him off his high horse. You do not have to be down and out for God to find you and change your life. Paul was such a changed person that he calls everything in his previous life “skubalon”. That’s Greek forwell... Our NRSV translates skubalon as rubbish,

but it was also the word for something a lot more earthy. I wonder if skubalon was considered a swear word like....well, never mind.

But for Paul it was important that not only does he get a radical awakening on the road to Damascus, but he knows now that he must continue pressing on. He can't just sit in Jerusalem and enjoy his newfound faith and spirituality. He must keep pressing on, he feels, in order to gain Christ, to know him and to do his will. It is both hopeful and a foretaste of what will befall Paul in the years to come.

And then there is the passage from the Gospel of John this morning about Jesus with his disciples in the home of his very good friend Lazarus and Lazarus' sisters, Martha and Mary. There is something at the same time hopeful, joyous, and ominous about this scene too, most especially.

I'm going to start at the end of the passage first because that last line is often misused and used out of context. "You always have the poor with you", we have heard people say. Sometimes that line is accompanied by a gesture of the hands: "You'll always have the poor with you...there's nothing to be done about it." It seems out of character that Jesus should tell his disciples to favor him over the disadvantaged. Jesus would never throw up his hands and say, "Oh well." But here is a case where knowing the original context is so important for seeing what a verse really means. Reading this passage on your own, with no history or context, leaves a lot to be desired. So, today is a case where it will be very helpful to open up the Bible that you find in your pew and look up Deuteronomy 15:11. That's on page 171. And what do you find there? Jesus was quoting this verse when he spoke to Judas. "Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you, "Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land." Deuteronomy 15:11

Ah! The original verse had a "therefore" in it! But like us, when we quote a familiar saying, we often leave off the second part. We might just say, "A stitch in time", you know. And we

expect that everyone knows the rest of the cliché. He would have expected that when he said “You always have the poor with you (and so you must open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land) but, right this minute, I just want to say, I won’t always be here.

We are allowed to witness a warm and inviting scene where they are eating dinner together with Martha serving, as usual, and Mary anointing the feet of Jesus with a costly and fragrant perfume. She doesn’t take a towel to wipe his feet, but her hair. It is an act of great love and intimacy. Maybe that’s one of the reasons Judas speaks out. Perhaps he’s jealous or embarrassed by the actions of Mary. Perhaps he’s blustering about the money because Mary’s action of love makes him feel like an outsider, which he certainly will be. Whatever the reason, Judas has not understood the significance of what Mary is doing, or Jesus’ words. He is being anointed now out of great caring love. Something new is about to happen. Jesus alludes to his burial, and then reminds the disciples that he will not always be there. “You ain’t seen nothin’ yet”Judas doesn’t seem to get it.

Your vestry and I, on the other hand, are doing our best to “get it”. We went on retreat yesterday. We were at Salisbury School with the vestries of Christ Church Canaan, St. John’s Salisbury, and the Chapel of All Saints in Cornwall. There were 28 of us all together and our retreat leader was the Rev. Max Maxwell from Grace Church in Hartford. We enjoyed the beautiful day, eating lunch outside, and taking some time to stroll the grounds in contemplation. The purpose of the retreat was twofold as I see it. First, it was an opportunity to meet with the vestries of our neighboring churches. It’s much harder to have a bad opinion of “those other churches”, when we talk to their members and compare our experiences, and enjoy each other’s company. Secondly, we all need, but especially those of us who have to deal with the business of the church, we all need to see that all we do is part of our spiritual life.

It might not seem like voting on how to fix the roof, or whether to put in a particular sort of hot water heater has anything to do with our spiritual life, but Max asked us to look at it

differently. God calls us to certain tasks and vocations and we may not understand why, but we are needed to do this work for the sake of the church and for building up the body of Christ. Along the way we may find that we have had a spiritual awakening too. God keeps on saying, "You ain't seen nothin' yet". And, as we spoke of yesterday, we also do this work for those who come after us. Alexis said, we may not ever sit under a tree that we plant this year. But we have many beautiful trees that we can sit under that someone else planted in decades and centuries past. This morning at coffee hour take a moment to thank a vestry member for taking the time to do the work they do, and to spend their Saturday with me and the other vestries, when there might have been many other things they'd rather do.

Speaking of thank yous and of opportunities to broaden our spiritual life, thank you Christine and the Trinity Choir for a beautiful and peaceful evensong on Friday night. This was another opportunity to give our Spiritual life a little room to live and grow within us. There are also many things to do on a Friday night, but I think that those who attended would agree that this was a lovely way to increase our conscious contact with our Triune God.

Palm Sunday is just around the corner, and Easter will be here momentarily. Lent seemed like such a long season when we were back at Ash Wednesday, but now everything is moving at a rapid pace. Jesus is in Bethany, just outside of the city of Jerusalem. Soon Jesus will enter triumphantly, and the passion will begin to unfold.

If we were on a rollercoaster ride, we would now be in the time of the car's slow clack, clackety, clack, clack, clack up the steep slope towards the high apex of the ride. Everything seems calm right now. Jesus is enjoying a dinner and conversation with his disciples. The view is nice as we climb higher and higher. Right now we can look around and enjoy the scenery. But no one on a roller coaster ride is fooled. We all know what happens after we reach the top of the ride. Jesus knew too what it meant that Jerusalem and the Passover were just ahead. There would be the joyous Hosannas of his followers, but also into the lion's den of the Pharisees and scribes, and Roman leaders and those who sought to kill him.

Once on the rollercoaster, you can't change your mind. You can't get to the top, look over the edge and decide maybe to get off now. You may think, "Why the heck did I decide to do this. Maybe this wasn't such a good idea," but there is no going back. You have to stay buckled into your seat for the duration. The time from Palm Sunday, through Holy Week and into Easter is the Spiritual roller coaster ride of our lives. We go from triumph to tragedy and then to the ultimate victory, in a very short period of time with not much time to look around and enjoy the view. But just as you would never consider jumping off of the roller coaster ride during the scary part and then getting back on just as it cruises into the station, I encourage all of you to stay with the ride of your life, stay with Jesus in this most holy season of the church year. Press on as Paul did to the goal of knowing Christ and his resurrection. "You ain't seen nothin' yet."