

Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> April 2019

## Fifth Sunday in Lent

Purple



### Collect

Most merciful God, who by the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ delivered and saved the world: grant that by faith in him who suffered on the cross we may triumph in the power of his victory; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen**

**Isaiah 43:16-21** English Standard Version (ESV)

### Israel's Only Saviour

43 <sup>16</sup> Thus says the LORD, who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters, <sup>17</sup> who brings forth chariot and horse, army and warrior; they lie down, they cannot rise, they are extinguished, quenched like a wick: <sup>18</sup> "Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. <sup>19</sup> Behold, I am doing 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. <sup>20</sup> The wild beasts will honour me, the jackals and the ostriches, for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people, <sup>21</sup> the people whom I formed for myself that they might declare my praise.

**COMMENT:** To the Israelites in exile in Babylon, this unnamed prophet delivered a message of great hope and promise: the exiles were to be set free and sent home. The capture of Babylon in 539 BC by Cyrus, king of the Medes and Persians, had made this possible. There was to be a new exodus. It actually occurred in 536, so this poem may well date from the intervening three years. Verse 16 recalls the first exodus and the journey through the wilderness to the Promised Land under Moses many centuries earlier. The passage of Israel through the sea and the subsequent destruction of their Egyptian pursuers. (verse 17) demonstrated that nature and history

are both under the sovereign control of the LORD. The prophet then calls for the exiles in Babylon to turn from memory to hope (verse 18) for a great new deliverance is about to occur. The road home is open to them as was the road through the wilderness and across many rivers to the Promised Land. This would happen because the LORD willed it for The Lord's own people. The LORD would provide life-giving water for them in the thousand-mile trek through the desert. That had been a crucial issue for the Israelites in their exodus from Egypt. Unlike their ancestors, the promise of water and safety from lurking wild animals would reassure those of weak faith. The return from exile in Babylon was not only an act of divine grace but also as a testimony to the LORD's mighty purpose for Israel. Verse 21 states unequivocally that The LORD's intent was that the exiles would declare the LORD's praise. Imagine the amazement of every tribe through whose territory the returning exiles passed. Two generations earlier, their Babylonian overlords had led the Israelites eastward in chains. Now they were marching homeward in a rejoicing throng spreading the good news of the LORD's blessed deliverance as they went.

### **John 12:1-8** English Standard Version (ESV)

#### **Mary Anoints Jesus at Bethany**

12<sup>1</sup> Six days before the Passover, Jesus therefore came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead.<sup>2</sup> So they gave a dinner for him there. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him at table.<sup>3</sup> Mary therefore took a pound<sup>[a]</sup> of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.<sup>4</sup> But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was about to betray him), said,<sup>5</sup> “Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii<sup>[b]</sup> and given to the poor?”<sup>6</sup> He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it.<sup>7</sup> Jesus said, “Leave her alone, so that she may keep it<sup>[c]</sup> for the day of my burial.<sup>8</sup> For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me.”

**Footnotes:** a. Greek *litra*; a *litra* (or Roman pound) was equal to about 11 1/2 ounces or 327 grams. b. A *denarius* was a day's wage for a labourer. c. Or *Leave her alone; she intended to keep it.*

**COMMENT:** Jesus appears to have made the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus his headquarters during his last visit to Jerusalem for the celebration of the Passover. It is not difficult to see why. Bethany was a hamlet just over the eastern ridge of the Mount of Olives. Today, when one looks eastward toward the Mount of Olives from any vantage point in the city overlooking the Kedron Valley, one can see the spire of the ancient church erected on the traditional site of the home where this incident occurred. The minaret of a nearby mosque is even more visible. The distance to Bethany from the Beautiful Gate to the Temple would have been no more than two miles and less than that from the traditional site of the Garden of Gethsemane at the foot of the Mount of Olives. Mary of Bethany, expressed her love and devotion to Jesus by perfuming his feet with a costly ointment and wiping them with her hair. We know who Mary was from John's explicit identification in the verse 1. That this family was well known to Jesus, is witness by the first introduction in Luke 10:38-42 (The Mary and Martha story). This event in the Gospel reading today shows some literary dependence upon an even recorded at Bethany and at the house of Simon the Leper in Mark 14:1-9, where the sum of 300 denari is mentioned, and which is also related in Matthew 26:1-13. In those two accounts the woman anoints the head of Jesus, and the criticism was about what was seen as a waste of expensive ointment. John's story also shows similarities with an event related in Luke 7:36-50, but the location in Luke 7 is the "city called Na'in" (Luke 7:11), and the woman is given as a sinful woman, but who anoints the feet of Jesus, is sorrow for her sins. There is a late tradition (6th Century onward) which identifies the sinful woman in Luke with Mary Magdalene, however, without any foundation. The story in John's gospel, as the event in Mark 14:1-9 (& Matthew 26:1-13) looks to the death and burial of Jesus, to which we look today.

**Psalm 126** *In convertendo* Grail Psalter

**℟** **What marvels the Lord worked for us! Indeed we were glad.**

<sup>1</sup> *A Song of Ascents.*

When the Lord delivered Zion from bondage,  
it seemed like a dream.

<sup>2</sup> Then was our mouth filled with laughter,  
on our lips there were songs. **℟**

The heathens themselves said: “What marvels the Lord worked for them!”

<sup>3</sup> What marvels the Lord worked for us!  
Indeed we were glad.

**✠ What marvels the Lord worked for us! Indeed we were glad.**

<sup>4</sup> Deliver us, O Lord, from our bondage  
as streams in dry land.

<sup>5</sup> Those who are sowing in tears  
will sing when they reap. **✠**

<sup>6</sup> They go out, they go out, full of tears,  
carrying seed for the sowing:  
they come back, they come back, full of song,  
carrying their sheaves. **✠**

**Glory be to the Father and to the Son  
and to the Holy Spirit,  
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be,  
world without end. Amen.**

**COMMENT:** This Song of Ascent celebrates the return of the exiles to Jerusalem. It echoes God’s intervention in Israel’s history as proclaimed in the prophecies of Isaiah 40-55. It may have been sung by pilgrims approaching the temple as part of a liturgy preparing for a new year.

### **Post Communion**

Lord Jesus Christ, you have taught us that what we do for the least of our brothers and sisters we do also for you: give us the will to be the servant of others as you were the servant of all, and gave up your life and died for us, but are alive and reign, now and for ever. **Amen**

### **Blessing**

Christ give you grace to grow in holiness, to deny yourselves, take up your cross, and follow him; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you, and remain with you always. **Amen.**