

## ABOUT TO DO A NEW THING

There are Sundays when the lessons and what is going on in the parish all line up on the same page! Today is one of those Sundays. The link is the theme: a new thing is about to happen. In our first lesson the prophet Isaiah is telling the Jewish exiles in Babylon that God is about allow them to return home: "I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?" In our gospel lesson we heard that six days before the Passover, Jesus and his disciples spent their final hours at a dinner in the village of Bethany with Jesus' friends Lazarus, Mary and Martha. Suddenly, Mary appears with a very expensive bottle of pure nard, which was a spice used for burials. She pours some of it out on his feet and then wipes them clean with her hair. This dramatic gesture no doubt shocked everyone, but Judas, the treasurer of the apostles, complained that she had just used something costing almost a year's worth of wages. Why was it not sold and given to the poor? Jesus responded by telling everyone to leave Mary alone. She bought the spices for his burial. Meeting the needs of the poor is always a pressing need, but this was a special moment, perhaps one of the last, when Jesus would be with them. The implication is that her dramatic action was a symbolic gesture indicating that a new thing is about to happen, his death on the cross and subsequent resurrection. In the epistle Paul wrote to the Philippians from his jail cell in Rome that, as proud as he was of his past, it was nothing compared to what was to come. He said, "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." To be in Christ is everything for Paul, and everything else pales in comparison. He is eagerly waiting to be reunited with Christ in the resurrection. Finally, this is

the last Sunday of the long interim that St. Barnabas has gone through to find your new priest. A new thing is about to happen here.

There are some things to clarify. First of all, the fact that something new is about to happen doesn't mean that everything that has happened before now is unimportant. In many places Isaiah tells the exiled Jewish people that they must never forget what brought them into exile. But, for now that is behind them and they must focus on God's new plans for them. It is not an insignificant point that before the end of his earthly life Jesus chose to spend the time with his good friends in Bethany. This is the Mary who so irritated her sister Martha because she sat a Jesus' feet rather than helping with dinner. Yet, her extravagant act of hospitality was actually a sign of what would happen in less than a week—Jesus' body would need to be anointed for burial. Paul lays out his credentials as a Jew of the highest standing and speaks of his transforming experience of Jesus. It is precisely because of his past experiences that he eagerly awaits his being reunited with Jesus, which is his heavenly calling. And, finally, these passages are not calling St. Barnabas to forget about its wonderful heritage—or I might add how well you have done holding everything together for almost two years without a resident priest. Like Paul you have much to be proud of. But, the word for you today is: hang on, the best is yet to come, God is about to do a new thing here at St. Barnabas.

Another way to talk about this tension between the past and the future is to talk about holy doing and holy being. Isaiah knew that what God wanted from the Jews was not ultimately a particular set of actions, but rather a relationship of trust. Israel was being called to return to its relationship of being God's chosen people—the people of the covenant. Certainly, there were all kinds of covenant obligations, holy doing if you will. But, at the center

of it all was a *holy relationship*—holy being if you will. That is why Mary meant so much to Jesus. Her extravagant action of pouring costly spices on his feet was gratuitous, not required, not expected. It flowed out of a holy relationship, out of Mary's life being centered in Jesus. Certainly, Paul reflects that same perspective. For him to live in Christ was everything. From that center of holy being would flow all kinds of actions, but they were secondary to staying centered in Christ.

So—what does all this have to do with St. Barnabas? I think that you have been engaged in an almost two year stretch of holy doing. Someone told me that everyone around here has about five different jobs. And, I might say, doing them well. But, now God is calling you to enter into a new season—one centered in holy being, rooted in your relationship with God and Christ. You have been busy Marthas and now it is time to rediscover your spiritual roots, to become the Marys sitting at Jesus' feet. Your new rector is a person of spiritual depth, who is well equipped to lead you in that. The temptation will be to expect her to come on board like a house on fire with programs and practical solutions to all your problems. But, whatever new thing that God is calling you to do will depend greatly on what the Holy Spirit reveals to you. Figuring that out requires discernment, which is a gift of the Holy Spirit. Again, what that spells is the need for a season of holy being, holy spiritual refreshment, holy relationship. Out of that time of spiritual recharging will come the clarity you will need for the road ahead. If you fail to do that, you run the risk of charging off without the spiritual energy you need to be successful.

One piece of taking time to recharge your spiritual batteries is to know that the holy doing that awaits you needs to flow out of a holy being centered in Christ. The last thing in the

world I want you to think is that you need to stop doing all the activities that you have kept going during the interim time. God forbid! If you did, you would kill your new rector with work. No, what I am talking about is spending some time together with her to identify the spiritual center around which all of your activities will revolve. In short, it means becoming very clear about being Christ-centered in all of your activities. Again, this is not a negative comment on your current work, but rather a call for becoming more intentional about the spiritual source of all of your good works. It is also the safest way you can move forward in revitalizing St. Barnabas. I think that there aren't a whole lot of people who are out there looking for five jobs to take on, but there is a great hunger for being spiritually centered. Holy doing needs to flow out of holy being, and holy being requires a serious commitment to sit at the feet of Christ. That is the heavenly calling that we are called to strive for. That is my prayer for you. You are a good faithful people. You deserve a time of spiritual refreshment, and the good news I bring you is God's word to you this morning: I am about to do a new thing in this place. AMEN.