

Sermon for 6 April 2025 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore

Fifth Sunday in Lent

Scriptures: Isaiah 43:16-21; Psalter (Page 847, response 2) Psalm 126; Philippians 3 :4b-14 ;
John 12 :1-8

Sermon:

Have you ever known someone who said, "Shut up!" instead of "Hush!"?

Especially in a church meeting?

Then what happened?

If you were there, what did you do about it?

It happened here, last Sunday.

I was the guilty party, and I'm sincerely ashamed and sorry.

I bring it up because it relates directly to our life together, as we are now.

We are very small, and our future is uncertain. We keep on coming together, carry on quite a few worthy ministries, and know we will soon be asked to make changes as our Annual Conference responds to the times, which are a changing.

Significantly, at that same "One Church" meeting last Sunday, we agreed to allow a professional financial advisor to propose and apply, with our agreement, ways to manage our significantly enlarged endowment. It was a major step, in a new direction, for this congregation.

So, between the bishop, the annual conference, and our financial advisor, we will be, with God's help, going in a fresh and constructive direction from anything we've done in the past few decades, or maybe ever in our first hundred years as a congregation.

The first two Bible lessons for today speak optimistically about the future. They're given to us this fifth Sunday in Lent as preparation for the new direction Easter always provides every congregation and every one of us Christians. This is the time to remember hard times always get us ready for fresh hope.

It's happened before. It will happen again. This is where we are, as Christian individuals, and as Bethesda members and friends. It happened after the Jews had spent a long time as captives in Babylonia, and they wrote about it to make us ready and willing for the new job and joy, and problems, that are always up ahead when you walk with Jesus Christ. In our country, we can remember that all the enslaved people who became Christians among us planted great songs

and courage among our whole national history and gave us attitudes and songs and many strengths that mark our national character.

The third lesson, from Paul's letter to the Philippians, gets very personal about this. He says his whole life is focused on the new direction God has planted right in front of us. Not that he's there yet, but that's absolutely where he's headed, and so should every little or large fellowship of Jesus people be.

Then we sum up our lessons for today with Jesus, and with his friend Mary anointing him with oil, getting us closer to the victory of Easter, after the death it's leading up to very soon in this reading from John's Gospel. And what does he tell Judas, who criticized Mary's act? I'll skip over Judas' motive, because we're not specializing in the betrayal and crucifixion yet. We're not there ... that will come soon enough in our worship experiences in these coming weeks. What I want to point to gets us back to the beginning of my remarks. Jesus, our model, our friend, our God-in-the-flesh, did not tell Judas to shut up. Instead, he gently told Judas and the whole group around him at that moment, to focus on the soon-to-be-arriving new start for them all.

This is my point. I made a mistake. I'm ashamed and sorry. I live by the forgiveness of God in everything I do ... I look for fresh opportunities to behave better. I walk, as each of you does, with that in my mind and heart ... and with you all, I plead for, and hope for, forgiveness and new opportunity to love and serve among us all.

In Christ's name,

Amen.