St. David’s Episcopal Church

Bean Blossom, Indiana

Lent 5C April 3, 2022

Sermon by the Rev. Kate Wilson

### Isaiah 43:16-21 Psalm 126 Philippians 3:4b-14 John 12:1-8

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### I watched an unusual program on Friday about a little Cuban-American boy in Florida who had clear memories of being a medieval Japanese samurai warrior. He had night terrors beginning at mere months of life. He crawled and walked and even spoke earlier than most children. He had surprising balance and agility as a toddler. But a frightening story he told and retold as he became able to speak was the oddest: he was a Japanese samurai and dreamed every night of the deaths of all his troops and, finally, of his own death in a moonless, starless night. He was a toddler. He knew nothing of Japanese history or samurais. He spoke of details at two and three years of age he had no reason to know.

### The most remarkable part of his story is that he was diagnosed with leukemia at four. His treatment took four more years. He suffered liver failure and his parents were told twice that he would not survive. Yet he did. He had decided to fight cancer as the samurai he was. His memories filled his tiny body with the strength and courage of a samurai. He survived, and later studied with a sensei to free himself of the crippling fear of the darkness that surrounded his medieval samurai self at his death.

### Is this hooey? Fiction portrayed as reality? Possibly. Believe what you will about reincarnation.

### But hold on to the strength and value of memories, whether individual or cultural. Isaiah and the poet of Psalm 126 strengthen the beleaguered Hebrew people with memories of their release from captivity centuries earlier. Isaiah begins with “Comfort, oh Comfort, my people, says your God” and continues with words for the heartsick people who are captive again, this time in Babylon. They have been without homeland, culture, customs for almost four generations. The elders are gone, the memories with them. The great Hebrew scholar Abraham Hershel wrote that “No words have ever gone further in offering comfort when a sick world cries.”[[1]](#footnote-1) Here, Isaiah says

Thus says the Lord,
who makes a way in the sea,
a path in the mighty waters,

who brings out chariot and horse,
army and warrior;

they lie down, they cannot rise,
they are extinguished, quenched like a wick:

Do not remember the former things,
or consider the things of old.

I am about to do a new thing;
now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?

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### My children, God is saying, as marvelous as was your first release, it will not be a memory as great as what I am about to do, I am about to do a new thing, now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?

### Blessed words of remembrance, hope, fresh and marvelous beginnings in freedom: Home. If only the Ukrainian people in exile inside and outside the Ukraine can anticipate these words. If only people imprisoned and captive throughout our nation and the world could be preparing for a new thing. If only they can perceive it, can feel the tingling of their fingers that a great thing is soon to happen. If only they can hold onto the faith flickering within them, for a little longer.

In the printed version of Psalm 126 in most bibles, there is a space between verses 1-3 and verses 4-6. It is a transition between a reverie of a happy past and hope for the future. It is belief that God can restore the waters of freedom and blessing for which they thirst, that they can lean to the task of planting in their own lands once again and reap not tears, but bountiful crops. Home. Home. Becoming whole. Becoming healed.

[Play “Goin’ Home” by Mo Mo Ya’s Silk Road.]

What does this music evoke? What memories? What longings? What wishes for a different story about home? What possibilities does it hold for our eternal homes?

Do not remember the former things,
or consider the things of old.

I am about to do a new thing;
now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?

Mary perceives it. She, Martha, Lazarus, and Jesus are enjoying a family supper together. Lazarus, raised from the dead, foreshadows Jesus’s death. By raising him, the authorities are more fearful of Jesus. Yet here Jesus is, with them, in their home, at their table, approaching Jerusalem and the end of his journey. Home. They are good friends. Jesus’s followers are with him, and we might think of this as a very joyful occasion. But there is something in the air. It is faint, it is distant. The Passover will be memorialized in only six days. The beginning of the next stage of Salvation history for the Jews, for all of us. The new thing.

Mary perceives it. Without a word, without a sign, Mary approaches her dear friend and breaks open a jar of nard. Brought along dangerous trade routes from the Himalayas, the only place in the world its fragrant plant grows, it is costly, worth a year’s wages. Something to be used sparingly, to be used carefully while preparing those most beloved for their eternal homes. Mary’s love is boundless. Her generosity is boundless. Her faith is lived in action, not in promises, not in claims, simply, in silence. Judas objects angrily. "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."

What? Hasn’t Jesus always put the poor and burdened first? Has he not taught us to Love God above all things and to love our neighbors as ourselves? Even in his last days, he helps us to see that we are worthy of love, as he is. We are deserving of care. Sadly, some folks don’t see themselves as love worthy. How, then, can they love others generously, as Jesus intends? He knows so much about our doubts and fears. He knows of the brokenness that strangles our loving God, our loving of self, and our love of neighbor *as we love ourselves*. Even Judas, for his selfishness and sin and treachery, deserves and is offered the love of God. Even he inhales the fragrance that envelopes them all. All share in this tender moment of grace. All share in this meal of thanksgiving. All are on the verge of Jesus’s great home coming. How do they respond? How do we?

Paul, who never met Jesus, seems to see the answer:

Not that I have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; 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.

Paul has renounced his power and prestige to reconcile with the way of Christ. He has transformed himself into an ambassador of Christ to much of the known world. Once he persecuted those faithful to Christ. Now, has continues a new thing.

We honor and love God through Christ, as did Mary.

We reconcile ourselves with God through Christ, as did Paul.

We, too, press on to the goal of union with God and love of one another. We value our memories to strengthen our souls and we free ourselves of them to embrace a remarkable, completely new thing as we find our homes in Christ.

Thanks be to God.

1. Abraham Herschel, *The Prophets,* Harper and Row, 1962, p 145, cited in *Feasting on the Word,* Bartlett and Taylor, Westminster Knox Press, 2009, p 124 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)