

**March 13, 2016**  
**Rev. Diane Monti-Catania**

**Sermon ~ “Looking Forward”**

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Human beings seem to approach life in two ways.

There are those who spend their time and energy in the past, either romanticizing ‘the good old days’ when everything was perfect and resisting change or stuck in the past, enslaved by memories or trauma that haunts their lives.

On the other hand are those who look fervently to the future – striving toward the next big thing, exhilarated by change – always certain that what’s next will be better.

Somehow, we have to balance this tension and actually live in the present.

We cannot go backward – ever.

It never works.

We cannot make ourselves into a younger version nor can we reverse the changes that have occurred in the world.

We also, cannot get to the future without living through the present.

We can promise ourselves that as soon as we get to X everything will change, but we have to admit that we have little control over much of our lives.

Our readings today explore this tension.

From the psalmist we hear: “*When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream*” demonstrating a look to the remembered past partnered with hope.

Hope is being able to imagine a better future.

Isaiah’s words of promise, “*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?*”

Do you not perceive it?

How often do we miss God’s activity among us because we are not attentive to the present moment?

We can be lost in the past or so consumed by the future that we don’t see what God’s new thing might be.

In our gospel story this morning Jesus comes to the home of his friends, a place where he has felt welcomed and perhaps feels safe.

He knows that he is being hunted and that he will soon face death.

Here, in this moment, Mary anoints him in preparation for that death and he in turn lifts Mary up, defending her for her generous act.

They are both squarely rooted in the moment.

Mary's extravagance foreshadows Jesus' own extravagance.

What do we learn from this?

I think the message for us is that we need to be present, in the moment, and we need to give it all that we've got.

We need to work at not being burdened by past or encumbered by the future.

At the church council last month we had a spirited discussion concerning the meaning of the word 'extravagant.'

I proposed a 'statement of extravagant welcome' to the Council asking that they consider going on record as being a church that welcomes all.

Some felt that extravagant was, well, too extravagant.

It seemed to denote an over-the-top, out-of-the-ordinary, activity that generated some anxiety.

This is what I believe we are called to do as Christians.

As we head to Jerusalem with Jesus and live through Palm Sunday, holy week, the crucifixion and resurrection we are reminded that Jesus was bold, over-the-top, out-of-the-ordinary – extravagant!

When Mary walked into a dinner party and poured a jar of scented ointment on the feet of the honored guest – that was bold, over-the-top, out-of-the-ordinary- extravagant.

When Jesus willingly gave his life to reconcile our relationship with God that was bold, over-the-top, out-of-the-ordinary, extravagant!

Barbara Brown Taylor writing on this passage notes:

“This bottle will not be held back to be kept and admired.

This precious substance will not be saved.

It will be opened, offered and used, at great price.

It will be raised up and poured out for the life of the world, emptied to the last drop.”

How about you?

What can you point to that you have done for God that would be considered bold, over-the-top, out-of-the-ordinary- extravagant?

In Robin Meyers provocative book, *The Underground Church* we are reminded of the radical nature of Jesus.

Meyers argues that the best way to capture the spirit of the early church is to recognize that following Jesus was, and must be again *subversive* – in the best sense of the word.

Jesus came to turn things upside down.

He challenged the status quo and demanded that the rulers and power brokers pay attention to the lowly and downcast.

Jesus came to heal a world broken apart by hatred, division, bigotry and greed.

We have made a commitment to follow Jesus – to challenge the systems in our own world that demean and degrade our brothers and sisters.

The church of today must be made up of people committed to the idea of covenant.

When God made a covenant with us, God said: "I will love you with an everlasting love. I will be faithful to you, even when you run away from me, reject me, or betray me."

In our society we don't speak much about covenants; we speak about contracts.

When we make a contract with a person, we say: "I will fulfill my part as long as you fulfill yours. When you don't live up to your promises, I no longer have to live up to mine."

Contracts are often broken because the partners are unwilling or unable to be faithful to their terms.

But God didn't make a contract with us; God made a covenant with us, and God wants our relationships with one another to reflect that covenant.

That's why marriage, friendship, life in community are all ways to give visibility to God's faithfulness in our lives together.

We just entered into covenant with one another to be the church.

My hope is that the ten people who joined the church this morning will transform us.

Because now we are different.

Each time we widen our circle we embrace the legacy of Jesus' beloved community.

As we strive, together, to build that community, let us leave the past behind.

Let us move forward, carrying with us the stories and lessons of our ancestors, with an eye toward the future.

But let us also embrace this very moment for all its beauty and all its potential.

Let us be mindful of the blessings that are here and now, enriching our daily lives.

As we head to Jerusalem next week, let us hold our heads high and shout Hosannas at the top of our lungs.

Our lives are meant to be a celebration.

For this last week of lent: Lighten up – have some fun –smile a bit and give thanks to God for this moment in time.