

## Pressing Onward

**Isaiah 43:16-21; John 12:1-8; Philippians 3:4b-14; Psalm 126, 03-21-2010**

I remember, when my middle child was studying to become a pastry chef, that she had to design a series of presentations for her desserts. One element that she was to incorporate into one project was that of motion...a dessert, had to show movement. My mind is slow at grasping how anyone can expect a brownie to show motion unless it is from the plate to the mouth. I learned, through her work and her imagination and artistic eye, that a dessert can, indeed, show motion just by the design of it. I do not have the talent or the patience for this kind of work, she does.

Motion is an important element in our lives. If we do not move about much we find things happening to our bodies that make them lose flexibility and strength. The same things happen to our minds when we decide to store them in mothballs and use them as little as possible. We become stagnant, uninteresting humans.

Just as motion is a vital element in our lives, we discover that it is an important concept in our scripture readings for this morning, as it has been through all the readings of Lent. From the days and nights Jesus spent in the wilderness, determining the direction in which his life would go, through Easter, there is motion—a time of pressing onward. God, through all this action, is doing a new thing over and over again hoping that we somehow will “get it” this time around, hoping that we will set aside the past and move into a new future.

In the words of Paul, this need to keep pressing onward is essential to us to come to grips with the life and teachings of Jesus and the way they apply to and enrich our lives and our souls. To resist understanding this is to resist our spiritual development and to lose our souls, our very beings, according to Paul.

All that he had and all that he believed was founded in the life of Christ. Paul had come a long way to reach this conclusion and he noted this in this morning’s reading. He had moved from being a rigid supporter of his Jewish faith to learning that Jesus had come to enrich that same faith through love and understanding and through teaching that the “spirit of the law” was far more important to life than the “letter of the law.” Paul had managed to let go of the past, a difficult thing for any of us to do, and to press on into the future. He saw that the interpretation Jesus brought to his faith was like “new wine in old wineskins,” an interpretation that would break his faith open to a better understanding and knowledge of God.

It takes many of us a long time to begin to fully understand what the life and teachings of Jesus are all about. It is difficult for us to set aside all that has happened in the past, to overcome our inertia and move forward. Most often we learn by inches as we move through life. When we do, we discover the value Jesus has had for us and continues to have. This is one way in which he lives among us. We come to understand what is right and true and good because of his teachings. We know we are to treat one another as we would like to be treated. We understand that those we may consider as the lowliest in our culture are to be seen through the eyes of Christ and recognized for their human value. We come to grasp that we are not to abuse anyone in any way and that we

are to have patience, understanding, forgiveness and love toward our fellow humans. We also come to know when we fall terribly short of living more Christ-like lives.

Perhaps, that is why, in these weeks, our scriptures about Jesus have such an urgency about them. He knew his time was limited and that he had to do all he could to win people to the way he believed was of God. He was in motion toward Jerusalem where he would surrender his life.

Our reading from John has him stopping at the home of his long time friends, Lazarus, Mary and Martha. His disciples had not quite gotten the message that his death was coming closer and closer although he had patiently tried, over and over again, to help them understand. Judas bemoaned the fact that Mary had spent money that could have been used in another way. But, Mary understood that they would be losing their friend, teacher and master. Her act was a prelude to what was going to happen. She sensed he would no longer live and move and have his being among them. How she sensed this we don't know. She might have listened more carefully than others and discerned the underlying cause of his continual action and his need to reach as many as possible before the end came. Mary was a follower and a student of Jesus, often letting housekeeping chores slide, just to sit at his feet and absorb all he had to tell her. He valued her, too, never sending her away.

As we approach the last weeks of our Lenten season, those that correspond with the last weeks of his life, we have time to consider the power and influence Jesus had in the lives of those who were closest to him, those who struggled to understand just who he was. We also have time to consider just what his living has meant to us. Have we learned that the present is all we have and that the past no longer should have a stranglehold on us? Have we learned that the need to press onward in sharing the "good news" with others is as urgent a task for us, as it was for those men and women of the past? Do we know that sharing the message of Jesus is best done through the example of our lives? These are questions we alone can ponder and answer. We do this in the knowledge that if our answers do not satisfy us, we have another chance to decide to turn our lives around that we might more truly follow the pathway set before us.

Amen