

Isaiah 43:16-21

John 12:1-8

Philippians 3:4b-14

“Those who go out weeping,
shall come home with shouts of joy!” AMEN!

“Cause baby there ain’t no mountain high enough,
ain’t no valley low enough,
ain’t no river wide enough,
to keep me from getting to you, babe.”

The song written by Ashford and Simpson
and first sung by Marvin Gaye and Tammi Terrell...

“Ain’t no mountain high,
ain’t no valley low,
ain’t no river wide enough, baby.”

All examples of God’s promise to you!

To everyone... that nothing can keep God
“from getting to you, babe.”

This is hope.

Unabashed and unblushing fullness
that is rooted in the realities of
the past and the present.

We look back at our lives and find God’s
hand guiding us through difficult times.

It is what Isaiah proclaimed to
the captive Hebrew people while being
dispersed in Babylon.

The prophet boasted of God's
power at work once again in doing
the same kind of deliverance God did
for the people enslaved in Egypt.

Through the work of God in Isaiah,
people remembered and then heard about
God doing a new thing.

This time there won't be a crossing of
the Red Sea nor 40 years of wandering in
the wilderness, but it doesn't mean
it will be easy.

It didn't mean the people would not be afraid;
returning home can be scary.

It meant God was about to deliver a rescue
and restore salvation.

“No mountain high, no valley low,
no river wide enough,” to keep God
from creating and recreating the necessary
conditions for liberation.

Today's reading from Isaiah is what
Professor Amanda Benckhuysen,
an Old Testament scholar, says

“is a text to read when it feels like
the world is crashing down around us,
when our minds are jaded and our spirits
too discouraged to see how God may
be present in our current [troubles].

This is the passage to read when
the dull thrum of life's rhythms feel
especially meaningless and tortured.

This is the text to read during Lent when
we come face to face with the mess
we as humans have made of our
relationships and of this world,

when we recognize how profoundly broken and
how incapable of fixing ourselves we are.

For in this place of helplessness and disorientation,
[we discover] that hope emerges.”

Even hopelessness and disorientation
cannot keep God from getting to you and
carrying you.

God did it before for you and God will do it again,
but in a new way, yet with the same active result
of deliverance.

Recall that the first exodus from Egypt,
was a rescue mission which became central
to the Jewish faith.

It is carried through to this coming exodus
from Babylon and then, for us, in the
work of Jesus Christ.

Can I get an “AMEN?” :-)

This clear message God is sending is
for the ears of the faithful.

The only fear we have should be
the fear of missing out.

On this last Sunday of Lent where
I am preaching, because next week
we will read the dramatic passion narrative.

On this last Sunday, we are invited to imagine
an invitation to the language we give
to what IS coming.

The language may be like a seed that springs forth,

like a path through mighty waters,
like a trip through the desert or wilderness

and...

it might be like water when we are parched.

It may be like a song about high mountains,
low valleys, and wide rivers.

God is coming to deliver and rescue.

Siblings in Christ,
“Do you not perceive it?” AMEN!

(Pause)

In the gospel lesson from John,
we experience once again the anointing of
Jesus before his death.

It was a significant event that occurs in each gospel,
but in John - it is different.

In this gospel, the anointing is done
by a close friend, Mary.

This close relationship with Mary elevated
the action of intimacy in the home of Lazarus

who now has a new addition to his name.

“The one whom Jesus raised from the dead.”

The occasion was centered around a meal.

“They gave dinner to Jesus,”
the author notes and after this scene
Jesus will make his triumphal
entry into Jerusalem.

What happened that night,
with the resurrected Lazarus, around
the meal from Martha and during
the anointing from Mary,

what happened will carry Jesus
to what will come next.

He will take all this with him into Jerusalem. (Pause)

Before we move into everything
that goes on after dinner, we just want
to pause and take that truth in.

This act of meal and intimacy
carried Jesus to what came next. (Pause)

What carries you?

The pondering of this question is
the foundation of the season of Lent.

Isn't this what Lent is all about?
What carries you?

We talked about prayer, fasting, and
the giving of alms to the poor.

Disciplines that carry us to how we anticipate
what God can do.

Did these things not cross Jesus' mind
after dinner that night, as Mary came
toward Jesus with the costly
pound of perfume?

As the fragrance filled the house,
a smell associated with
the anointing of the dead.

It filled the home and symbolically
communicated that Jesus was a dead man,
while in the midst of
a resurrected man - Lazarus,
what Jesus did in the
raising of Lazarus
cannot be ignored.

For Jesus knew he couldn't get away
with raising Lazarus from the dead without
severe punishment.

In the midst of the heaviness of the moment
we are told of Judas' greed.

While the author doesn't pull any punches to
tell us Judas' motives.

We note, though, that Jesus did not condemn Judas.

He simply defined what Mary did.

She made an extravagant gesture that
became shockingly intimate.

“She wiped Jesus feet with her hair” is
almost exactly the phrase used to
describe Jesus' wiping of the disciple's
feet at the Last Supper.

Also, a shockingly intimate gesture.

That meal when Jesus washed his disciple's feet,
and this one, proclaims hope in
the midst of horror.

Every bit as much as a funeral sermon proclaims
the resurrection, with a dead body in the room.

And today's lesson reminds us that
Jesus carried all this with him...
to the betrayal, the trial, the cross, and
to the grave.

[But] baby, there ain't no mountain high enough,
ain't no valley low enough,
ain't no river wide enough,"
to keep God from getting to you.

This is our reason to be confident.

Our call to press forward, to the goal
because it is exactly what Jesus did.

What God did to make us God's own.

And who we are is wrapped up in who Jesus is.

AMEN!