



The Westminster Pulpit

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“The Time of Your Life” **Sermon on John 12:1-8**

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“Do not remember the former things... I am about to do a new thing.” That was the Word of God that Heidi read. “Do not remember the former things...” How can anyone do that? “Do not remember the good old days. Do not remember the bad ones, either. Do not remember that Duke lost. Do not remember the should haves, would haves, could have done. Do not remember the times you got stabbed in the back or patted on the back. Do not remember the grief. Do not remember the former things... How much time do you spend in the past?

How much time do you spend in the future? I am about to do a new thing. That’s what the future is: a new thing. Full of wonder. “I wonder what’s going to happen next. Full of worry. “I’m just afraid of what’s going to happen next.

“Do not remember the former things... I am about to do a new thing.” Somewhere in between is where we find ourselves.

We heard that from the Psalmist. “The Lord has done great things for us...” Remembering the former things. But then a pause! “Restore our fortunes, O Lord...” “Do a new thing, Lord.”

The Word of God this morning is for those who are caught between the past and the future. Which is the NOW. The only thing we have control over is right now. So, what are we to do with this time? It is the time of our lives. Listen:

John 12:1-8

Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him.

Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, 'Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?'

(He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) Jesus said, '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.'

John writes, "Six days BEFORE the Passover..." We like to look forward to the next celebration, six days BEFORE Passover. We live a week before Palm Sunday! Have you got your Easter Lillies ordered? Two weeks after Easter is Senior Sunday. And then it's Mother's Day and all the babies are being baptized.

Next, we give thanks to Heidi and celebrate her retirement from pastoral ministry...though I can't see her ever retiring. Anyway, that's on May 18. And the next weekend is Memorial Day, and then it is Summer. Let me remind you, we are open in the Summer! "It was six days before the Passover..." We look forward and we look back. Forward and back.

John writes, "They were at the home of Lazarus..." The Lazarus of John's Gospel is the brother of Mary and Martha. And one day just happened to be his last day. Lazarus was dead! It was too soon! That is to say, Mary and Martha loved their brother, and when you're in love, death is always too soon.

It shakes your faith. It just seems to point to the absence of God. And so, Martha let Jesus have it. "Lord, if you'd been here, my brother would not have died. You were just too late!"

Jesus said, "Where have you laid him?" "Come and see!" This is the great call of discipleship in John's Gospel, "Come and see!" And we all know Jesus' response to the call. It is the shortest verse in the Bible. "Jesus wept!" Because he knew what he was about to see was a tomb. Lazarus would have to come out so that Jesus could go in. God was about to do a new thing, and death is always a new thing.

"Roll away the stone!" Jesus commanded. "Lazarus, come out!" Jesus commanded. And stumbling out of the tomb came that mummy! "Unbind him and let him go!"

In Hebrew, Lazarus means: "One whom God has helped." How did his parents know?

"They were at the home of Lazarus." What else are you going to do at the home of Lazarus but look back?

After all, you come in and greet Mary and Martha, and then it occurs to you that the last time you saw Mary and Martha was at the visitation. Open casket. Nothing says dead like an open casket. You remember. The soloist sang, "It is well with my soul." You remember. The motorcade through town and the policeman on the bridge put his hat over his heart. You remember. The grass was high at the cemetery after a week of rain. Not the day to wear high heels. You remember the former things.

But there is Lazarus standing over in the corner of the living room, putting some cheese on a Ritz cracker. He is the center of attention! John writes, "Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus.... They gave a dinner for him." For whom? Jesus or Lazarus?

Now I know the Lamb of God is in the room! But, just a second, Jesus, I need to say hello to Lazarus!

"Lazarus! You're looking so good since the last time I saw you! Now, tell me, what was it like being dead? Do you remember? How about the moment when you came to yourself after being dead? What was that like?"

"When you come back from the dead, do you stay married? I mean, the contract says, 'Till death do us part!'" So many things to talk about with Lazarus! "Does your family get to keep the life insurance?"

These are the distractions! But presently, Jesus, the bread of heaven, is in the room!

Martha served! She got the place ready. The black crepe was folded up and put back in the attic, along with a box of sympathy cards! I meant to send one. Did you send one?

Martha served with a bounce in her step and joy in her heart as she added a pinch of salt to make it! Perfect! A little water spot on the crystal. Popped the cork on the 20 BC Cabernet. This is what we do! But Jesus, the true vine, is in the room!

Suddenly, the aroma of perfume. I've never been one to favor my steak and potatoes with a large side of perfume. I'd be upset! But, presently, Jesus, the door to life, is in the room!

It was then that Judas thought to bring up the Social Gospel! You can never go wrong with the Social Gospel. If you're on the finance committee at church, you can always look pretty good if you bring up the Social Gospel!

I know the air conditioning has gone out, but what about the poor? I know the roof leaks, and we need a new air conditioner, but what about the poor? I know the nursery needs a new changing table, the roof leaks, and we need a new air conditioner, but what about the poor?

I'm telling you, if you want to give the right answer to any meeting in church, that's the one to give. What about the poor? And then, after the meeting, you can drive your SUV home and park it next to your motorcycle, put on your silk pajamas, pour yourself a scotch, and watch the game.

Judas said it, "Not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief." But presently, Jesus - the way, the truth, and the light – is in the room!

"Leave her alone. The poor you'll always have with you! She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. But you do not always have me."

Do you think Mary knew? Do you think she knew that she wasn't always going to have Jesus?

Do you think she bought the perfume with the moment in mind that she would anoint the feet of Jesus and dry them with her hair? Her whole life leading up to this one moment!

If I were to make a guess, and this is only a guess, I don't think God makes anyone that clairvoyant. I think Mary just saw who was in the room! I think she saw her life as being with a good shepherd. I think she saw her life being with the light of the world. I think she discovered the bread of life! The cup of salvation! And instead of remembering the former things, instead of wondering about the new thing, she was in "the now" of Jesus! Past, present, future - all wrapped up in one. All being wrapped together in love.

I was thinking about a few former things this week. Just on Friday, a man whose mom died, was in the office. "My condolences on the death of your mom." His voice broke as he said, "Death is always a new thing. I'm just glad we could love her all the way to the end..." And there was something in his voice that signaled to me that love never ends! Past, present, future.. all wrapped up together in love. Do not remember the former things...

Do you remember the former things? Maybe in the cupboard, you have a jar of thanksgiving! Maybe we should all anoint a dear one. Anoint someone who has made your life rich. Anoint the poor one. Anoint the hungry. Anoint the one hurting. Anoint the one angry. Anoint the ones on the left and the right.

Lavish them with love. Carry out the command! "Love one another just as I have loved you; you must also love one another." It is the command of our Lord Jesus Christ, and it is the one we need to follow for these days. We need to get this right. And presently in the room, where two or more are gathered, Jesus is here. It's the time of our lives!