**First Reading Isaiah 43:16-21**

*The prophet declares that long ago God performed mighty deeds and delivered Israel from Egyptian bondage through the waters of the sea. Now, God is about to do a new thing, bringing the exiles out of Babylon and through the wilderness in a new Exodus.*

16 Thus says the Lord, who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters, 17 who brings out chariot and horse, army and warrior; they lie down, they cannot rise, they are extinguished, quenched like a wick: 18 Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. 19 I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. 20 The wild animals will honor me, the jackals and the ostriches; for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people, 21 the people whom I formed for myself so that they might declare my praise.

**Psalm 126**

1When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, then were we like those who dream. 2Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy. Then they said among the nations, “The Lord has done great things for them.” 3The Lord has done great things for us, and we are glad indeed. 4Restore our fortunes, O Lord, like the watercourses of the Negeb. 5Those who sowed with tears will reap with songs of joy. 6Those who go out weeping, carrying the seed, will come again with joy, shouldering their sheaves.

**Second Reading Philippians 3:4b-14**

*Writing to Christians in Philippi, Paul admits that his heritage and reputation could give him more reason than most people to place confidence in his spiritual pedigree. But the overwhelming grace of God in Jesus calls Paul to a new set of values.*

Paul writes: 4b If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: 5 circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; 6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. 7 Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. 8 More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not

having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith. 10 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, 11 if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead. 12 Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. 13 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, 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

**Gospel John 12:1-8**

*Judas willfully misinterprets as waste Mary’s extravagant act of anointing Jesus’ feet with costly perfume. Jesus recognizes that her lavish gift is both an expression of love and an anticipation of his burial.*

1 Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. 2 There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. 3 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. 4 But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, 5 “Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?” 6 (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.) 7 Jesus said, “Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. 8 You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.”

**Sermon**

I’d like to begin by considering Judas’ argument in today’s passage. To be honest, it seems what is written here about him…that he is the one who betrayed Jesus and that he didn’t care about the poor, but he stole from the common purse…is intended to make him seem like a the bad guy in this scene. And yet, I think his argument is very relatable for us. He believes that the excessive amount of money used to buy the perfumed oil that Mary used here was wasted, that it could have been better spent elsewhere.

I’m sure we can relate to the concern about waste. It has become quite a public conversation as the current administration makes deep cuts to funding to numerous programs and to personnel who hold government jobs all in the name to ending waste and fraud. And so, we discuss what do we consider wasteful? But these are conversations we should have in our homes, with our spouses or between kids and parents…what do we consider wasteful spending? How do we define it? Is it defined by the amount that is being spent? Or by the quality of the item or the time on which the money was spent? Then again, many of us have learned that its is okay to have “mad money” which, in my understanding is a certain amount that we can spend on anything we want without any judgment on whether it is wasteful.

Do we talk about wasting money or resources in the church? We do, though it often comes in the form of someone who has an issue with how “their” money is used by the church. I mean that in general in churches, not that it happens \*here\*. It would certainly be beneficial to talk about it as it relates to both the way the church uses our resources as well as how we as people of faith view waste and the faithful use of our resources.

But it’s very complicated. We can see that in today’s gospel passage. Because Judas stands there, and he’s made out to be the bad guy and yet we can sort of see his point about how the money Mary spent…which was about a year’s salary in those days…could have provided food for a lot of poor people. Jesus seemed pretty big on helping the poor, so that suggestion is not that far from being a good idea. How could spending money to feed the poor be a bad idea? It’s like how we joke that whenever you are in Bible study or Sunday school and your not sure about the answer to a question, just answer “Jesus,” and you’ll probably be right. You could also answer “feed the poor” and you’d probably be right as well.

As is always the case in John’s gospel, however, there is more going on here than meets the eye. So, let’s set the scene for what Mary is doing. First of all, this family of Mary, Martha and Lazarus are very close with Jesus. In John 11, Lazarus dies, and Jesus comes 4 days later and raises Lazarus from the dead. We’ve talked in that past about the phrase the writer of John uses in Chapter 1 to describe what has come into the world through Jesus, the Word. The description is that, through him we have all received “grace upon grace.” The raising of Lazarus from the dead, the power that Jesus demonstrated over death, is just one example of the

grace upon grace poured out on this family. Grace upon grace indicates a lavish, abundant amount of grace, poured out as though from a spring, where the water flows constantly.

Grace upon grace was abundantly poured out on this family as Lazarus, who was dead and in the tomb in Chapter 11, now lives and reclines at the table with Jesus. Grace upon grace was lavishly poured out upon this family as they share yet another meal together in the presence of Jesus and, presumably, some of his other disciples. As a response to this unbelievable experience made possible through Jesus, Mary acquires this expensive perfumed oil, poured it on Jesus’ feet and wiped his feet with her hair. Sometimes, when a guest has his feet washed by a servant or washes his own feet, oil might be provided to give a little moisture to the dry skin of the feet. Here, Mary kneels in the position of a servant, uses this very expensive, very fragrant oil and anoints Jesus’ feet.

Jesus does not scold or embarrass Mary as Judas tries to do. Instead, he defends her and interprets her act as preparation for his burial. In this way, Jesus points us all to the final sign or moment in John’s gospel when Jesus lavishly and abundantly pours out grace upon grace for all of humanity through his death on the cross. Yet there is something else about Mary’s actions that are important…she kneels to anoint Jesus’ feet just as Jesus, in Chapter 13, will kneel and wash the feet of his disciples. This position of humility and service…kneeling at the feet…is how Jesus describes the life of discipleship in that same chapter. Mary is both responding to the divine grace upon grace and reciprocating in the position of servanthood with grace upon grace.

First and foremost, this whole family enjoys a close, intimate relationship with Jesus. That relationship is central to everything else. And it seems to be the one thing that Judas is lacking as a disciple. It isn’t so much that his suggestion was bad; it was that he hasn’t yet been drawn into a relationship with Jesus that allows him to respond gratefully to the abundant grace upon grace poured out for him, for all. He is not grateful, he is not in awe, he is uncomfortable.

What might change if we looked at our use of resources…as the church and as people of faith…through the lens of the gift of grace upon grace from God through Christ? When we consider our use of money or other resources, how do we reflect in the world the lavish, abundant grace upon grace that Christ won for us all through his cross? Has the Holy Spirit

enabled us to experience gratitude for all the Christ has done for us so that we may respond in service to Christ, pouring out grace upon grace, the gift of true life, for those who need it most? Amen.