

Lent 5/Year C
 Isaiah 43:16-21
 Philippians 3:4b-14
 John 12:1-8

The Present Moment

As some of you know, my husband Skip had heart surgery about a week and a half ago. He's home now, and all things considered, doing fine. But during the week he spent in the hospital, I was once again reminded how time in hospital moves at its own unique pace. There are prolonged periods of waiting interspersed with others of frenetic activity.

This was especially true in the Surgical Intensive Care Unit. After waiting four and a half hours for the surgery to be completed and then another hour or so before I could see Skip there (only made bearable by the presence and phone calls of friends), by the time I finally got in, I felt like I entered an alternative universe. The purpose of the ICU of course, is to pay very close attention to the patients, but when I got to his bed I was struck by how my sense of time became riveted to the present moment in contrast to the previous hours of the day.

In the morning when we first got to the hospital, we waited for surgery to start, and once it started, I waited for it to end. Plus, while I was waiting, I also was thinking about what the next several days would be like and what we would need to do once he came home.

But now, in the ICU, looking at Skip in such distress with all these tubes coming out of him (for those familiar with *Star Trek*, he looked kind of like a Borg), all I could do was hold his hand and pray, moment by moment, because each moment counted.

Reflecting on the experience afterwards I realized how difficult it can be staying in the present moment. Many of us don't reside there easily. We spend a lot of time thinking about what has happened in the past and planning for what might happen in the future, with maybe a passing glance at what is actually happening right now. It's somewhat ironic how the present is something we'll get to later when we have time.

But being in the present moment can take work because we have to stop and pay attention to what is happening right now and let any

distractions go. Which is why it sometimes takes something rather extreme to get our attention and hold us to the present.

This is now the fifth and final week of Lent. The Gospel readings in the weeks leading up to this point have slowly moved us towards Jerusalem, entreating us to think deeply about the nature of our faith and what it really means, what the consequences are, of being a follower of Jesus.

But today, however, we take a sharp turn towards Jerusalem and ultimately towards the cross. Today we are challenged to not just remain in the present moment, but to remain present, even when it is hard, even unto the foot of the cross.

Jesus has just raised Lazarus from the dead and his days are clearly numbered as the religious authorities are looking for him. They want him to be contained, out of their world, gone, dead. Jesus most likely knows this and what awaits him in Jerusalem. But before he goes there, he, and his apostles, stop in Bethany for dinner, at the home of Lazarus, in which his sisters Mary and Martha are also present.

Obviously, the striking picture from today's Gospel is the very intimate interaction between Jesus and Mary, in which she bathes and anoints his feet with perfume and then dry them with her hair.

It's an interaction which seems rather strange in the context of our modern Western world. However, in their time the washing and anointing of feet could be seen not just as an act of hospitality but devotion as well. But there seems to be more happening here.

Regardless, we do not, cannot, know with certainty what compelled Mary's actions that night. Perhaps it was out of thanksgiving for the life of Lazarus, or all the ways Jesus had changed her life, or maybe even a sense of foreboding for what was to come. But, and this is key, Mary gave Jesus the best of what she had at that point of time—her wealth, her attention,

her focus, her love. It spoke volumes in contrast to Judas' disdain and self interest.

And Jesus understood this. He knew the time she spent with him at that moment, would sustain her in the difficult days ahead. His admonition to Judas was clearly not a callous statement of indifference to the poor, but rather a statement of fact, something to be paid attention to right then.

But that was then. What about now? What are we to make of this some 2000 years later? Certainly our context is different. We know what is going to happen. Jesus will shortly go into Jerusalem, he will be persecuted, tried, hung on a cross, die, and three days later be resurrected. We know some time later, the Holy

Spirit will mysteriously descend upon the disciples, allowing Jesus to still be with us.

But our knowing that may actually get in our way now. Because much of what we know, or think we know, is in some ways just a linear chronological timeline which is very different from *kairos*, or God's time, which compels us, in the moment to be, to remember who Jesus is, why we choose to follow him, and the incredible love he shows to the whole of creation.

Kairos time grounds us in the reality, that even when the present moment is hard, it is still sacred, for Jesus by his very life, anointed it and deeply desires to be in it with us.

The Rev. Barbara Crafton puts it this way beautifully:

I believe that time is an earthly thing. God doesn't have it—or, rather, God holds time, but is not held by it, as we are. For us, its grip is iron. None of us escape its passing, and the passing of time feels sad to us more often than it feels glad. We mark the passing time by the things taken away from us . . . It is not so with God. All moments are now in the kingdom of heaven, where all are in Christ and Christ is all in all. All, as in *everything*: everyone, every time, every place. Everything. You and me: all we are and ever were and ever shall be.¹

We cannot escape time passing but we can make the moments granted to us, count, to not lose them in the noise and business of our lives. Because each of those moments brings us the gift of being with Jesus, "where our true joys are to be found."

And when looked at that way, how could we let anything so extraordinary slip away?

But we do. Something I was profoundly reminded of a couple of years ago. I have told this story before, so please bear with me, for the moment.

Several years ago, around this time of year, I was running around like a nut, trying to get ready for Holy Week and as I was going from my

office to the Cathedral, I glanced up at the heavens and said, "Please help me get done everything that needs to be done," and immediately the response I received was, "Please just spend time with me."

It is the same thing he asks of each of us, to just spend time with him. It's remarkably simple and almost overwhelmingly true.

And so bearing that in mind, today we pause at table with Jesus and his dear friends, before we begin the final walk with him as he heads towards Jerusalem. This moment is sacred. Let us pray we will be like Mary and give Jesus the very best of what we have right now and each step of the way.

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¹ Barbara Crafton, "Flying into Yesterday." The Almost Daily eMo from the Geranium Farm. March 12, 2010.