

“Perceptive” Sermon for April 7 2019
5th Sunday in Lent

Sermon Text: Isaiah 43:18-19

Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old.

43:19 I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?

The word perceive has two Latin roots-capere which means “to take in” and “per” which means “entirely.”

Those who perceive are those who get the big picture, see the whole thing, see the beginning and the end of a thing. They both recognize the signs of what is going on and discern what is behind those signs. They clearly grasp the sign of the times.

The prophet Isaiah proclaimed to Israel, “Pay attention, God is doing something brand new, something very different? Do you see it? Can you discern it?” He did not ask Israel to do anything. He called upon Israel to be attentive to what God was

doing—and that it would be different from anything they had understood or experienced beforehand.

Surely restoration was involved as the psalmist suggested, but what was being restored? Was it a city, a nation? No something more, it was the restoration of a relationship. What relationship? When? How long ago had the relationship ceased? Those are all questions that we can speculate on, but they do not get us where we need to go, a view of the big picture as God sees it for us.

The Psalmist tells us that perception lends itself to joy, to laughter, to enthusiastic celebration, and to praise. When we are perceptive we are able to say and shout it loudly, “Adonai (The Lord) has done great things for us and we are having a party because of it. Parties are for celebration. The Psalmist celebrates the prophecy, not knowing its

full contours. Discerning, perceiving, is not knowing details, but rather having the capacity to understand that what is happening is in God's hands.

After the Psalmist celebrates God's new thing, God's intervention in human affairs, God's rescue and restoration, he then prays expectantly,

Restore us, O God. Make those of us who now struggle in tears, experience the expected joy. May we who now go out every day weeping, carrying our seed for sowing, be restored as we return to our homes with shouts of joy, carrying the new thing-it having become a part of us because of our loving service.

When we are perceptive, we face the future and proclaim as the apostle did, "Whatever I thought I had achieved, whatever gains I considered myself to have made, they are nothing before God in Christ.

I surrender it all just to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and to claim my share of his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.

The woman purchased the most expensive perfume she could afford and anointed Jesus' feet. She perceived that water would not do. She perceived what foot rags would not do. She saw, even in his cracked, travel-weary feet, a new reality. She wiped his aching feet and brought comfort with the expensive compound of nard and her hair.

We, being crucified with Christ, have nevertheless in the same instant been brought to eternal life. For the life we now live is an eternal one, an unending one a life of the spirit of renewal and resurrection, enabled by our perception of God's new reality.

To him be all glory and power and honor and wisdom now and in the world to come. Amen.