

**SERMON APRIL 3, 2022, St. Augustine's in the Woods, Episcopal Church, Langley WA
Kathryn Rickert**



Anja Rožen, a 13-year-old elementary school student from Slovenia is the winner of the international contest Plakat MIRU. She was chosen among 600,000 children from all over the world. "My poster represents the earth that connects and unites us. People stick to each other. If one person let go, the rest will fall. We are all connected to our planet and to each other, but unfortunately we are little aware of it," said the young creator. (See V. Lambergar, 24 hrs. with) 🙌🙌🙌 from Facebook

What is the New Thing God is doing now?

"It" is *almost* over... this 5th week of Lent, in the 3rd Lent of the Long Lent that began in 2020,

It, Lent, Winter and Covid is Almost over. Almost.

So, what do we need now that "it" is *almost* over?

Almost, but not quite. People are still getting sick, and the war in Ukraine, and other tragic situations are not over, yet.

Of the many spiritual resources we might gain from these readings for this time of almost over, HOPE is the one that appeals to me the most.

These lessons fit within the category of what Bishop Stephen Charleston calls the "poetry of hope," something we probably take an interest in mostly, only when hope seems to be endangered.

This "poetry of hope" holds out to us some powerful antidotes with which to resist clouds of discouragement that we see in many directions. The poetry of hope offers us alternative images to take into our souls, to feel within our bodies, so as

to work against and replace those others images and feelings of hopelessness, disease, war, and disruption, which are not so far away.

While hope is one of the strongest offerings in these lessons, there certainly are others that I will not attempt to deal with.

Those include – pondering what it means in the Gospel when it says, “the poor you will always have with you, but you do not always have me?”

But rather, here I would like to invite you to imagine the fragrance of that outrageously expensive ointment that the woman with the alabaster jar pours on Jesus feet, imagine it in a way that is compelling to you,

...imagine that fragrance, hold on to it. And use it as a place holder for the hope that we are seeking. (As in Christ our Hope.)

Our search for hope becomes weighed against how woven together “we” are with the whole world. And when “we” means the whole world, for that is who Jesus cares about, How do “we” have hope and look forward to something better, something new, when there is still so much suffering going on? How do we have hope when there is so much suffering unrecognized and unlamented?

When the situation looks to be impossible, unprecedented, outrageous, way out far beyond what we know how to deal with, even crazy, how do we have hope?

Our Christian faith suggests three things here:

We will pay attention, *with God's help*, (as in paying attention as a form of prayer) to all that is going around us, good and bad.

We will, *with God's help*, ask these difficult questions, from time to time,

and, again *with God's help*, we will continue to live in the Hope offered to us by our God, even in the face of what looks to be impossible.

When we look at these stories (OT and NT) that we have known for a long time, we notice...that God's promises of hope, help, redemption, reconciliation, rescue, love,...

all along, have been *about HOPE in the face of completely impossible, unrealistic, and unrepresented situations, entirely against the odds.*

Our God is the God of the impossible, the God who offers hope in the face of the impossible --

...it was like a dream, it seemed impossible, etc.

Our God who makes a way through the sea,
sends water where there is no water,
turns people who are weeping into those who rejoice

The reading sounds so “normal” when we hear it. It does not sound outrageous.
But it is outrageous.

It might help us to back up through more of a Hebrew rather than English
understanding of these words, and hear this as

Our God, with our participation, does what cannot be done...
builds roads for walking on in the ocean,
makes water gush about in a place that has not seen water in years..
protects us in situations where we cannot protect ourselves from,
a dangerous and violent enemy
and is recognized for doing so by the most unlikely of sources!!
And furthermore, reminds us of this all within an intimate setting, a tender
exchange says ...

(Listen for the tone of voice. What is the tone of voice saying about God?)

Yes, we have had some “issues in the past,” some unresolved
disagreements, but, let that go, I have dealt with it.
Let us move on *together* in our loving, relationship and *together*, we will
do something New.

Let us notice the “together” part. God’s part is the offer of hope,
and our part has to do with noticing what God is doing, entering into
these New ways that God is making, *together*.
We are not going back to the same old-same old, and the New will be far
beyond anything we can ask, imagine, or plan for. ...

So, a promise of hope based on God’s reminder, and tender conversation is
ours.

Thus armed with hope, while also acknowledging the high level of challenge as
we look forward to the end of these hard times, and to a joyful celebration of
the Feast of the Resurrection at Easter, *.? just what are we looking for,
expecting, etc.*

The hope offered is *not* a promise of a return to things as they were before...

Pre-Exilic

Exile

Post-Exilic

Life of Jesus /before the Death & Resurrection Post-Resurrection

before Covid

Covid

Post-Covid

The promise of hope, was/ is to something better, rather to take us back to the good old days, to return to where we were before all of this started, as though none of this has happened, as though we have not learned anything from all of this suffering, those of others and our own.

Let us not waste the suffering. (Marlene Kropf) "Waste" meaning to not learn from, not be transformed by, become caused to grow in awareness, compassion, and wisdom by paying attention to our own suffering and that of others.

For it is the places in-between the before and after pictures where the new life comes into being.

It is while wandering in the wilderness, before entering the promised land.

It is in Exile, away from home and before returning there,

it is between the Life and the Death & Resurrection.

that hope is born to arise later on.

The Hope is a promise of something better, something NEW!

Let us ask ourselves... what have we learned over this Long Lent?

and...what are the "new things" that God is doing now;

what we are looking for, seeing, witnessing to for this Easter?

Before, I thought faith was more about maintaining the traditions of the past, meaning... that our goal now would be to return to a time, place, or ways of being *just as they were before*. But now, I am seeing again that faith *all along is about finding, noticing, witnessing what happened, learning from Exile, Lent, Covid, death and helping to bring about what is "new," new life now.*

... we are called to noticing, paying attention to, witnessing to, and participating in.... whatever are the new "ways that God is making" Now!

And exactly what are the New ways that God is making now? I do not know. But the patterns for those New ways *are* to be found in the past. And I do see, believe that those new things are springing up among us here, and around the world.

Whatever this New way may be, these New things will have the same *characteristics*, and qualities of justice, mercy, wisdom, compassion, kindness, humility, and love,..the kinds of spiritual powers that bring out and sustain tremendous courage, integrity, and vision under the worst of circumstances.

And likely, these new things will appear in forms that are strange, unfamiliar, and certainly unexpected, and unprecedented.

This unexpected and unprecedented is our link to the Gospel today– of the many characteristics we might observe about Jesus, doing things the way we have always done them before, is NOT one of them.

In a time, a hard time, when the whole world, and we here on this island are in need of hope, we've been reminded to look for the New Things that God is doing, reminded by the One who remembers what has been forgotten.
(meaning, we can let that go)

This offer of hope held out to us this day *is like the fragrance* of that outrageously expensive ointment, used by the woman with the alabaster jar to anoint the feet of Jesus, to prepare him for his burial.

It is invisible, controversial, powerfully beautiful, long lasting, and inescapable.
May our Hope be so.

May we rejoice together as we see the New things that God is doing among us, now. **Amen.**