

Sermon Lent 5 Year C by Ron Kolanowski at St. James'

“Do not regard the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?”

In the reading from Isaiah the prophet's God makes ways in the sea and extinguishes the forces of death. Chariots and horses, armies and warriors, all are vanquished by the God of life. Desert and wilderness yield to fresh springs of water. This is the God of Jesus, who nurtured life among the dying and the outcast. (T)

A few years ago, I had a friend named Chuck who had a problem with alcohol and cigarettes. His struggle created all sorts of problems. He got in several car wrecks, including driving into the glass sliding door of his house. His wife divorced him and he became estranged from his children. He had a good job and made lots of money but he paid a high price for his lifestyle.

As he got older and continued his habits he got cancer. It was around **this time** that I came to know him. Even with the disease, he couldn't kick the habits that were literally killing him. It wasn't that he didn't want to change...he couldn't. He couldn't conquer his demons.

He was a nice guy and people liked him, but he was a prisoner to his addictions. As the cancer worsened he ultimately was in the hospital and near death. I went to see him for what I thought was the last time. To my surprise he didn't die and had a miraculous recovery. The recovery was slow and painful...In the midst of his rehabilitation and treatments a

marvelous thing happened, for the first time in his life he didn't have a cigarette sticking out of his mouth or a drink in his hand. Through his long ordeal of recovery he beat his addictions.

He came home and seemed a changed man. He had a zest for life and looked at everything new. Rather than whine and complain, he now saw the beauty of life. It was as if he was born again. He was alive for the first time in many, many years.

About three months later the cancer took hold more firmly and this time he didn't make it and died. However, for those few months between his bouts in the hospital he was alive. He finally conquered those forces that kept him imprisoned. In those few months he did more living than he had in dozens of years.

I am about to do a new thing: do you not perceive it?" A new thing happened in the life of my friend Chuck—something he didn't anticipate. After a life of struggle and failure...of loss of family and friends because of addiction a new thing was created in him that gave him new life. He stopped complaining. His former wife and children re-connected with him in those months. He went from a time that life was a burden to looking forward to each new day.

This fifth Sunday in Lent leads us more directly into the anticipation of Jesus' passion. John's unique narration of the anointing of Jesus features the trio of Lazarus, Martha and Mary. Very recently in John's story, Jesus raised Lazarus from death. Lazarus' liberation created such a stir that the religious authorities begin plotting for Jesus' murder.

The entire account in John must be grounded in an appreciation for the gravity of the events ahead of them and behind them: their experience (past and future) was grounded in the sacred convergence of life and death. Mary receives criticism not for anointing Jesus, but for doing it so lavishly. Indeed, when Mary anoints Jesus we encounter the heart of the Lenten journey — a journey of faith and hope in the midst of death.

I think this idea of God creating a new thing can also apply to Mary who anointed Jesus' feet with costly perfume. In her love for Jesus, in her openness to his message, in her desire for something more in her life—she recognizes a new thing was created in her heart. Out of her deep gratitude and love she takes something of great value and expresses her love by anointing his feet.

Like my friend Chuck who saw a new thing in himself those three months before his death, Mary saw the new life kindled in her and prepared Jesus for his impending death a few days later.

“I am about to create a new thing, do you not perceive it?”

What is this new thing that is being created here and now? What is it that is being created anew in our lives? And, how do we respond when we discover a new thing created in us?

My friend Chuck, in the midst of his cancer, was more alive than any time before. He celebrated the new thing created in him despite his impending death. God used Chuck like he used Mary to remind us that a new thing can be created in places where we think we will not find new

life. New life can come out of dying and death to our old ways. In the midst of pain and suffering something beautiful can emerge.

This is our story. Each of us has a place in our lives, that in spite of our limitations, in spite of illness, disaster and loss, God is doing a new thing in us. This is the story of Lent and Easter. From the ashes of suffering and death a new thing is created that gives life to the world. In the suffering and death of Jesus, emerges abundant with life.

Today God is saying to you and to me, **“I am about to do a new thing in YOU. I am going to create new life in the desert of your life in ways that you cannot yet imagine. And, I do this new thing in you so you might declare my praise. Do you not perceive it?”**

Amen.