

Bible Challenge March 7 - 13, 2016

INTRODUCTION

The Lord our God makes all things new. In the first reading God promises it. In the gospel Mary anticipates it, anointing Jesus' feet with costly perfume in preparation for the day of his burial. In the second reading we recall the transformation of Saul, the persecutor, into Paul, the apostle. In baptism, God's new person (you!) rises daily from the deadly mire of trespasses and sins.

FIRST READING: Isaiah 43:16-21

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

Adventure Challenge: Isaiah 43 (or Isaiah 43: 14-28)

Explorer Challenge: *Option A.* Read Exodus chapters 14 & 15 to refresh your understanding of the references in verses 16 – 17.

Option B. Research *Babylonian exile* to learn the historical background for Isaiah 43.

Option C. Study the balance in Isaiah 43 between remembering past events (learning what history teaches us) and God's promise "to do a new thing"-- expecting something in the future that past experience would suggest is impossible.

PSALM: Psalm 126: *Those who sowed with tears will reap with songs of joy. (Psalm 126:5)*

Adventure Challenge: Psalm 126.

Explorer Challenge: *Option A.* Research *Psalm (or song) of Ascents* to learn about the group to which this psalm belongs.

Option B. Consider how this psalm develops the topic of this week's readings: God makes all things new. What in this psalm is about old things and what is about new things?

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.

Adventure Challenge: Philippians 3 - 4:1

Explorer Challenge: *Option A.* Read all of Philippians, one of the shortest of Paul's letters.

Option B. Explore Philippians 3 - 4:1 to see how, the passage (like the reading from Isaiah and Psalm 126) values both old and new, what has been achieved and what lies ahead. (For example: compare 3:13-14 with 3:16.)

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.

Adventure Challenge: John 12.

Explorer Challenge: Read John 11 – 12:19 and 13:1 – 20 to hear the entire Lazarus story and to compare Mary's act a similar act by Jesus, a short while later.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Creator God, you prepare a new way in the wilderness, and your grace waters our desert. Open our hearts to be transformed by the new thing you are doing, that our lives may proclaim the extravagance of your love given to all through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of

the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus. (*Phil. 3:13-14*)