

Sermon by Pastor Michael Price on April 6, 2025

at Christus Victor Lutheran Church in Columbia, SC

Transcript by L. Scott Johnson

Speaking of change in seasons, as we were just talking to the kids about it, I have to just take a point of personal privilege to talk about a change in season for me. You probably noticed that I'm using reading glasses a little bit more and more each day.

Throughout my life when I was younger, I would notice my mother or father would have glasses. They'd have them up here, right? And they'd be like, "Where are my glasses? Where are they? Has anybody seen my glasses?" And today, I was standing back there. Nobody saw it, but I'm going to tell you anyway because I like to embarrass myself, OK? But I was standing back there and I had hooked my glasses on my pinky like that, and I was holding the book, the big book. And we were getting up time to go and I was like, "What did I do with my glasses?" I'm picking my pockets. I'm doing this. "Where are my glasses?" I'm like, "Oh, that's right. I'm holding it." So I was holding the book like this and then the glasses were here.

Anyway. Change in seasons.

Dear friends in Christ, sisters and brothers,

Grace, mercy and peace belong to you. They're already yours because they are gifts that come from God who loves us, who has made us and fashioned and formed us, and who saves us. Amen.

Lent is precisely, I believe, the season that makes the most sense to hear the kind of promises that we heard Suzanne read from both the Old Testament and our New Testament readings¹. That sense of how God's seasons really do change, and how it is that we as a people, as followers of God, followers of Christ, how we as a people are called continually to strain forward. How God continues to do a new thing, and that we are called continually to lean into what it is that God is doing.

It's difficult at times because a lot of times what's new sometimes can feel like a challenge to what's old and good and time-tested and a good thing. But oftentimes the challenge that humans face is how change is not simply something that might happen in one's life, it's only a matter of when it happens in someone's life. Or when it happens in our life together. Change is something that develops and is something that ought to be expected.

To follow Christ, I believe, is a deliberate following into that transition, a deliberate following into a transition, any kind of transition. Any kind of change where it is important to say goodbye to what has come before, and to say hello to what is coming up. Oftentimes, oftentimes it can feel tumultuous because it feels as though we are losing something. And while that may be true, it is also true that we gain something.

Christ experiences a moment where a neighbor of his, someone who has benefited from his ministry, has experienced tremendous change. She has experienced where God is doing something brand new in her life that she had never imagined before. He sits in a house with someone who had died, and no one in the family could have could have imagined what would have come next. He sits in the midst of a place where change and transition has happened in dramatic ways, both internally and spiritually for Mary and physically and, well, *scientifically?* for Lazarus. Jesus sits in the midst of this feast and all Mary can do is fall to her knees, break open an expensive jar of perfume and anoint

¹ Isaiah 43:16-21 and Philippians 3:4b-14

Jesus' feet. And while Mary may have an inkling of what she was doing, and she probably did, Jesus certainly did have an inkling as to what this costly ointment meant. This was a ritual, a ritual of change. It was a ritual of thankfulness. It was a ritual of thankfulness of the change that has already taken place in Mary's life. It's a ritual of saying goodbye. It's a ritual of praise. It is a ritual of care, both for her God and for her neighbor.

This was a moment that encapsulates and embodies all those complex human emotions that go into what change might mean. The grief that comes with it, the hope that comes with it, the uncertainty that comes with it. Here is Mary performing a worship and performing a service to the neighbor all in one. An act of worship that's not clearly defined as, well, she did it because of this reason and this reason alone. There are lots of reasons why she broke open that jar of ointment. Jesus gives one, "She's preparing me for the day of my burial."

Lent is an extended season where the church once again comes face to face with the truth of change in our own lives, change in our life together, change as an experience of human beings, and yet still calls upon the same faith that lived in Mary. The kind of faith that would break open something expensive and use it for an act of devotion and worship, love and service. The kind of faith that recognizes something is happening. The kind of faith that puts hope and trust into what is coming up and what is that new thing that God promises.

"Behold, I'm doing a new thing," says God, "making water courses in the desert."

Lent is this season where we're still in the desert and we cling to a promise of renewal that has yet to be realized. And it calls for just the kind of faith that Mary has. Mary is our example. Mary is our tower right now, our rock. She's the one that we look to. If we're not looking to Christ, then we look at her. For she has been the one that recognizes the moment for what it is and has offered a sense of worship, has offered a sense of service to her neighbor, and has done so in one fell swoop.

Change can be very difficult and not always welcome, especially when change includes the loss of what we knew. But Mary here demonstrates that the call of God remains quite, quite the same. Straining forward to what lies ahead. Holding on to hope and never losing the continued call to devotion to God and to neighbor. Remember Christ, Christ for Mary represents both. He's not one or the other to Mary. Mary's devotion to him in this moment, this intimate moment, is a devotion for both God and neighbor. And in that lies that simple call of faithfulness. That in the midst of such change, in the midst of such uncertainty, she breaks open the costly jar of ointment. She anoints Jesus' feet. She wipes his feet with her hair. In an act that Jesus defends and even points to his disciples and says in some ways, "Pay attention. Pay attention to this faithfulness."

Lent is that season, that season where we deliberately withhold the promise. You and I, we know how this story goes, right? Or if anybody hasn't seen this episode, there's some spoiler alerts coming, okay? Spoiler alert: Jesus does die. But what's the great promise? Does he stay dead? He rises again. He's resurrected from the dead and inaugurates the renewal of heaven and earth.

But Lent is that season where we deliberately hold off. We don't rush to that conclusion so quickly. Because if we rush to that conclusion too quickly, we don't recognize the power of Mary's actions. We do not see the faith that has been woken up in her, the trust, the love, the devotion. And when we can see that, then we might understand a little better the call of God in the midst of change, in the midst of loss, in the midst of grief, in the midst of sorrow, in the midst of whatever new is coming next. Because when all of that is taken away, we are left with a call. A call of love. Just in case you think that this word is cheap, I will point you to Mary once again. It's expensive. It means something.

May our eyes and our minds and our hearts be directed toward Mary this day. Give thanks for her witness, her boldness, her certain audacity, her faith, her strength. And give thanks for Christ who

redirects his disciples completely and says, "Pay attention." Pay attention to what faith, service, love, mercy, what it looks like in the midst of a very heavy moment. May we look to that and may God wake up that faith within us. May we come to the table around Christ himself. Give our love and our honor and devotion, but more importantly, receive the very faithfulness that's always been ours that comes from God. A faithfulness that endures from age to age, generation to generation, season to season, youth to old age.

Amen.