

## Sermon for 21 March 2010 Lent 5C – St. Francis

Three years ago, a popular movie used as its title a term that has become common in our vernacular, “The Bucket List.” In this movie Morgan Freeman played a dignified blue-collar mechanic who had lived his life simply supporting his family and enabling his children to have advanced educations he never enjoyed. As he is diagnosed with terminal cancer he shares a room with a billionaire healthcare mogul played by Jack Nicholson who openly resents having to share anything with anybody. As the reality of his prognosis sinks in Freeman’s character wads up and discards a sheet of paper on which he has been writing. Nicholson’s character discovers the sheet the next morning, a sheet entitled Bucket List.

As both men are now dealing with the reality of a terminal diagnosis they set out to use the wealth of the healthcare mogul to enable them to do all the things on that list. All those things they each want to experience before they die. But despite the fun and thrills they enjoy as they cross item after item off, race car driving, skydiving, climbing the pyramids, and going on safari, it is the power of the friendship they build and each learning what matters most in life that is the real Bucket List. In a defining moment Nicholson’s character learns that the coffee he has treasured and spent small fortunes to attain, Kopi Luwak, is literally rubbish or as the Greek in Philippians is more accurately translated excrement.

Both Paul in today’s Epistle and Jesus in today’s Gospel are living their own bucket lists. Because we are dropped in the midst of each story we need a little background to understand the larger drama at play. Paul writes his letter to the Philippians from prison where he is awaiting trial for a capital crime under Roman rule. Paul knows he is facing a death sentence. Jesus has returned to Bethany and to the place where he raised Lazarus from the dead. He had retreated from Bethany verses earlier because his raising of Lazarus had led Caiaphas the high priest in Jerusalem to declare Jesus’ death sentence with these famous words: “You know nothing at all! You do not understand that it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed.”

Both Paul and Jesus given their impending deaths deliberately choose to spend time doing that which brings them joy. Paul writes to the church he established and clearly treasures in Philippi. At ease with his listeners he expresses himself honestly sure that they will understand the peculiarities of his personality. “If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh I have more,” he crows, trusting that his audience knows behind his bravado is true humility born of losing all he counted as important for the higher gift of knowing Christ Jesus. However,

just in case they do not he reminds them of his earlier accomplishments that now have become rubbish (think Kopi Luwak) and of the faith that drives his life now. Paul seems to picture his unseen audience and direct his writing as though he can see their faces enjoy their responses as each word is delivered. It is a letter written full of love.

Meanwhile, John tells us Jesus left the security of retreating to near the wilderness to prepare to enter Jerusalem for the Passover Festival. In doing this Jesus is actively pursuing a path that will lead to his death. But before he goes to Jerusalem he shares one more night with dear friends including Lazarus and his sisters Martha and Mary. Please note that John is clear in placing this Mary as Mary of Bethany the sister of Lazarus. Her generous act is in part a response of gratitude for Jesus' saving her brother. First she takes the role of a servant by caring for Jesus' feet. She pushes the bounds of modesty by loosening her hair in front of non-family members. But she acts out of devotion and sincere love for her master who revived her brother. Her gift is extravagant and costs roughly one year's wage. But what price would you put on having a beloved member of your family restored to life?

Months early Jesus might have voiced the very objection that Judas does but as his own death looms Jesus sees such extravagance in a very different light and is genuinely grateful for the care and attention. It is a moment of true intimacy and solace that will help him face the days ahead. It is also important to note that Mary wipes Jesus' feet just as days later Jesus will wipe the disciples' feet as he tells them how deeply he loves each of them.

Today is the last regular Sunday in Lent before the dreadful events of Holy Week unfold before us. This week take time to bask in Jesus' presence just as Lazarus, Martha, and Mary did that night back in Bethany. This week take time to be extravagant for Jesus' sake and give of your best to honor our Lord – fill the Narthex with shoes and socks to care for the feet of our neighbors and fill the church with the perfume of lilies for Easter. This week take time to embrace a moment, cherish a friend, reach out to someone you've been meaning to call or write. Paul knew who he wanted to be sure he told how dear they were to him. Jesus chose who he wanted to be sure he shared one more evening with. Let us follow those examples and treasure the moments we have. Do not wait; for each moment is a gift from our generous God.

