

“Want Something New?”

Message by DD Adams

Providence United Methodist Church

5TH Sunday In Lent

NEW MEMBER SUNDAY

March 13, 2016

Today’s Scripture reading is taken from the Old Testament. Isaiah 43, verses 16 through 21. I’ll be reading from the *Common English Bible*. The LORD says— who makes a way in the sea and a path in the mighty waters, who brings out chariot and horse, army and battalion; they will lie down together and will not rise; they will be extinguished, extinguished like a wick. Don’t remember the prior things; don’t ponder ancient history.

Look! I’m doing a new thing; now it sprouts up; don’t you recognize it? I’m making a way in the desert, paths in the wilderness. The beasts of the field, the jackals and ostriches, will honor me, because I have put water in the desert and streams in the wilderness to give water to my people, my chosen ones, this people whom I formed for myself, who will recount my praise. This is God’s word for God’s people. Thanks be to God.

Let’s pray. God of grace and mercy, thank you for your presence. Thank you for those gathered here to worship as we lift up your name. Bless those within the hearing of my voice to receive your words with faith. Bless the reading, hearing, understanding, and doing of your word. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Amen. Peace be with you!

The book of Isaiah contains three separate collections. Isaiah 43 is within a group of 15 chapters, 40 through 55 and is called “Second Isaiah.” It represents the period when the Jews were exiled in Babylon in the sixth century before Christ.

Not all the people of Judah were exiled to Babylon. King Nebuchadnezzar only deported the most prominent citizens: professionals, priests, craftsmen, and the wealthy. The “people of the land” were permitted to stay in Judah but were scattered and the land was redistributed to them once the wealthy had been deported. The “people of the land” were the majority according to the book of Lamentations, and they were ravaged by famine. The Jews were no longer an independent nation, and their homeland was demolished.

So during the exile there were the Jews in Babylon and the Jews who remained in Judah. No matter where they were, in Babylon or in Judah, they weren’t free. Despair and hopelessness tore their hearts. They needed someone to encourage them and give hope for the future. The prophet Isaiah filled this role.

As Christians, we’re taught to remember the past faithfulness of God when faced with troubling times. Thing is, the past can be remembered unrealistically and be romanticized. Faith can get stuck, but there are benefits to the trials that stretch us. Fact is, the Jews became captives because of their disobedience, and they blamed the Exile because of their own impurity. Sin has this way of exacting a wage from us.

Isaiah wanted to rekindle the people’s faith so they could believe God for the present and hope again. So the prophet cries out to the people to look for and anticipate signs of what God is doing now, in the present and forget the past. Listen to verses 18 and 19. “Don’t remember the prior things; don’t ponder ancient history. Look! I’m doing a new thing; now it sprouts up; don’t you recognize it? I’m making a way in the desert, paths in the wilderness.”

Suffering changes us, and the Jews learned from the exile. They began to look to God as never before. They repented and walked in obedience. When they returned home to rebuild Jerusalem they were free from idols, synagogues rose up, and the people had a deeper respect for the Law of Moses.

The 70 year captivity gave them a yearning for the Messiah, and it encouraged a personal relationship with God. They began to understand the reason they were chosen by God. That through Judah, Jehovah might bless the whole world and show the blessedness of serving the one true and living God.

The Jews longed for something new in their lives. Hearing and trusting God brought them new hope and courage. Their religious fervor was revitalized, and they were able to anticipate and expect God to do great and new things in and for them.

It's as though God took their past and used it as a springboard for their faith in the present. No longer was it a place they got stuck in. Verses 18 through 21 reads "Don't remember the prior things; don't ponder ancient history. I have put water in the desert and streams in the wilderness to give water to my people, my chosen ones, this people whom I formed for myself, who will recount my praise."

All of us have a longing for "something new" in our lives, but the hunger for something new seems to lead to a pointless race. We look for satisfaction and reach for things we think will pleasure us and fill the space that only God can fill. We run toward *things* we think *might* heal our brokenness, only to discover, only God heals the broken-hearted.

And that's where the Jews were in Babylon and Judah . . . that is . . . *until* they turned to God, repented, and started walking in obedience. "The Lord is close to the broken-hearted (Ps 34:18) . . . to those with a broken and contrite heart" (Ps 51:17). There are some things in our lives that need to be broken: pride, self-will, stubbornness, and sinful habits. When we do feel broken, and turn to God, God makes a way for one who's contrite and lowly in spirit" (Isaiah 57:15).

God states he will put water in the desert and streams in the wilderness of our lives to give water to a people he's formed for himself. At the Second Coming of Christ the world will be renovated and renewed, and Revelation 21:5 states, "I

am making all things new.” What we can experience in the 40 days of Lent and Holy Week can renew our spiritual lives with God. We can start over. We can turn away from things of the world and repent as God leads us to a more excellent faith!

Whoever is burdened and feels discouraged today from what’s happening in their lives, here’s some food for thought and something new. God hasn’t changed, and his character hasn’t changed toward his children! The Lord says, he “. . . makes a way in the sea and a path in the mighty waters . . .”

As Pharaoh’s army was swallowed up in the sea, and as something supernatural takes place and sprouts forth in your lives, and as God guides his people through the wilderness and provides, and as water gushes out of the rock, and as rivers in the midst of our trials give refreshment as the Holy Spirit lifts our spirits—God’s work is constant and hasn’t changed and it works to deliver in ways we don’t understand.

There will be newness that sprouts forth in your life as you draw close to God, and it will lift you up to a place of worship despite your circumstances. God isn’t restricted to act in the ways he has in your past or to accomplish acts of salvation in new and different ways. But let’s look for God’s presence.

Let’s recognize the signs, and trust God to keep his promises so that we might declare his praise and the wonderful deeds he’s accomplished when he called us out of darkness and into his marvelous light! For God promises to do “a new thing” in our lives and in our church. Let’s learn to trust God more.

Let’s pray. God of hope who is intentional and involved in our daily lives, even when we’re not looking, open our eyes to the wonder of your presence around us that will show us you are doing a new thing. God who is present with us now, help us to learn that our burden will be lightened with the knowledge of God living in our hearts. “This one thing [we] do: forgetting what lies behind and straining

forward to what lies ahead, [we] press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.” Amen.