

“Behold I am Doing a New Thing”

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Isaiah 43:15-21

This is the Old Testament lesson for today from the Common Lectionary. So this passage is being read this morning all throughout the country, all throughout the world - Roman Catholic churches, Episcopal, Lutheran, most Pres. Meth. & UCC churches all use the common lectionary. - OT lesson, Epistle (Letter) & Gospel lesson. Let's take a look.

Isaiah 43:15-21

I am the Lord, your Holy One, the Creator of Israel, your King. Thus says the Lord, who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters, who brings out chariot and horse, army and warrior; they lie down, they cannot rise, they are extinguished, quenched like a wick: Do not remember 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? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. The wild animals will honor me, the jackals and the ostriches; for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people, the people whom I formed for myself so that they might declare my praise.

I once had a Baptist minister who attended the church I was serving. - a wonderful man named Bob. He went through a very long and serious illness. The first time I went to see him during this time he said, - “Well, what word from the Lord do you have for me?” I didn't know if he was teasing me, testing me, challenging me or what. “What's the Word from the Lord?” He'd say it each time.

I came to understand that in his tradition when he would visit someone in a serious situation he would have a scripture verse that he had thoughtfully and prayerfully picked out just for them.

- “I have a Word from the Lord for you -*
- It's Phil. 4:13 - I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength.*
- It's Jeremiah 29:11 - I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord. “Plans for your welfare, to give you a future with hope.”*
- It's Matthew 28 - “Lo, I am with you always even to the end of the age.”*

Once I understood that, I came prepared for my visits with Bob. - I came with a Word from the Lord.

Well, in our scripture lesson this morning Isaiah has a Word from the Lord. That was of course the job of the Old Testament prophets. - God's spokesmen, God's megaphone. They listened for the Word of the Lord for the people of their day, and then they stood and delivered it. In fact, in the Old Testament you encounter this phrase,

"And the Word of the Lord came to Jeremiah.

"And the Word of the Lord came to Ezekiel.

"And the Word of the Lord came to Isaiah."

Isaiah's Word from God to the people was this:

"I am about to do a new thing, now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?"

"I will make a way in the wilderness.

"I will make rivers in the dessert."

"I am about to do a new thing."

The context of the passage is the Babylonian Exile (6th C. BC). The Jews had been carried off to exile in Babylon, now modern day Iraq. It was a far cry from the Promised Land. So these words would have gotten their attention: *"I am about to do a new thing, now it springs forth."* These words would have also jumped out at them: *"Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old."* In other words - this is going to be totally new. Don't compare it to the past. Look for something brand new. Look for a whole new category. Don't expect God's activity to be a repeat of what's God's done before. God's up to something new. Do you perceive it?

What a great passage to encounter in the midst of Lent. We said a few weeks ago that Lent isn't just a time to give up something simply to prove to ourselves that we can do without it. It's not just a time to be more disciplined or austere. It's a time for God to do something new in our lives. Lent leads us to the New Life of Easter. Lent literally ends at midnight of Holy Saturday, the night before Easter. Lent is the journey to new life. Lent is about God re-creating us. "I am doing a new thing. Do you perceive it?"

Question - have you ever experienced something like that? Have you ever sensed God saying that to you? "I want to do something new with you."

I suspect you've never heard that audibly, unless you're a true mystic. God tends to speak through the tug of our hearts and the stirring of our souls, through our day-dreams, our longings, our aspirations, often through our friends and even through our closest family members. God nudges us toward newness.

And God has the power to make us new. *“If anyone is in Christ there is a new creation. The old is gone. I am making everything new.”* (II Cor.5:17) - St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, echoing Isaiah’s words I am about to do a new thing. Do you perceive it?”

Now, I can’t prescribe what that is for you. I can’t play the Holy Spirit for you. We each need to have our spiritual antennas turned to the heavens. We each have to figure out the newness God is leading us into. So instead of me trying to guess, I’d like to spend the next few minutes telling you about an individual who had God do something new in his life. And he would describe it that way. God made me new. God did a new thing in my life, in my heart. God converted me to a new way of living.

His name is Paul Wadell, a professor at St. Norbert College in Wisconsin. When Wadell was a teenager his mother handed him a piece of paper with a Thomas Merton quote on it. The quote was: “Deliver me from pride, which is the heaviest of burdens.”

Wadell says that for most of his life he lived with this heaviest of burdens, and he wasn’t even aware that he was prideful at all. But he always needed to be better than others - smarter, more successful, one up, fiercely competitive in all areas of life. And he cared way too much about what others thought of him. He took himself way too seriously, and didn’t take others seriously enough. His world revolved solely around himself, and as long as life was working out for his best advantage he was happy, or at least he thought. He now sees that way of living as a lonely place to be - always having to be first, always needing to be above others.

All this trapped him in his own sterile, little world. It wasn’t until he crossed the threshold of humility that he truly began to live.

“I could never admit that our greatest human need is not for admiration and praise, but to be known and loved and accepted by others, because that could never happen while I stayed safely turned in on myself . . .Pride was killing me because it cut me off from the love and goodness and mercy that bring us to life . . . I thought I was prospering, but I was shut tight in a tomb, gladly refusing to be resurrected.”

Paul Wadell came to a new life through meditating on the Cross of Christ. He saw that God enters our lives not so much *“through our strengths and successes, but through our weaknesses, struggles and fears.”* He saw that the beauty and power of Christ was in his humility. He also came to see how pride had wounded his soul and that he had “enthroned” himself in the place where God should be.

“If we try to pretend all is well with us - that we have no flaws, no needs and no shortcomings - then nothing can reach us, nothing can touch us.” But

humility *“opens up the world”* to us. *“Pride skews our vision - it bends the world to ourselves.”* But humility frees us to respond to others openly, to connect with people graciously and genuinely.

If our religion should do anything for us, it should at least make us more humble. We who worship, “Almighty God” and serve a humble Savior. Shouldn’t our religion help free us from the heavy burden of pride?

God did a new thing in Paul Wadell’s life. And it illustrates what Lent is all about - crucifying our sins and rising to new life.

It’s not just taking away something bad.
It’s about God doing something new.

It’s not just about less sin.
It’s about more joy, more life, more love.

And that I believe is a Word from the Lord.

Think about it.

Let’s pray about it.

Lord Jesus Christ, you once said to your disciples, “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart.” As we seek to partner our lives with you, we know that humility must become a habit of our hearts - so that we might learn and grow, give and receive, listen and love. Teach us your ways, Humble Savior. In your beautiful and precious name. Amen.