

The Federated Church of Hyannis
January 24, 2021
Sermon: “New Beginnings” Part III

Scripture: Isaiah 43:14-21

This is what the LORD says - your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: “For your sake I will send to Babylon and bring down as fugitives all the Babylonians, in the ships in which they took pride. I am the LORD, your Holy One, Israel’s Creator, your King.” This is what the LORD says - He who made a way through the sea, a path through the mighty waters, who drew out the chariots and horses, the army and reinforcements together, and they lay there, never to rise again, extinguished, snuffed out like a wick: “Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland. The wild animals honor me, the jackals and the owls, because I provide water in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland, to give drink to my people, my chosen, the people I formed for myself that they may proclaim my praise.

Introduction:

This is the third week of our series on “New Beginnings”. In week one we talked about the book of Revelation being about God doing a new thing. In week two we looked at Dr. King and the need for change. This week is about **the hope** found in a new beginning.

As you may have noticed the passage for the past two weeks was from Revelation 21 speaking of the new heaven and the new earth. And there is a reference in it to Isaiah 43 that indeed the Lord is able to do a new thing.

Part 1: Can the Lord do a New Thing?

Why does the Lord need to do a new thing? Truthfully, I don’t question God’s motivation. Like Walter Cronkite, I just report it as “and that’s the way it is”. Scripture tells us from time to time that the Lord decides to do a new thing. While God may have created the world in six days and rested on the seventh day, that seventh day was not the end of the process of creation. God still does a new thing today in the story of creation. For example, through the atonement of sin we are made new in the likeness of Christ. Through the resurrection, though we may die we also receive new eternal life by resurrection. So God doing new things should not come as a surprise.

I have learned there are many seasons to life. The world is constantly changing, we are changing, society is changing. God does not change, but God does from time to time do a new thing. These new things often usher in new eras of theological understand to who God is. That is because God chooses to partner with his creation. And so when creation does something new, it is only fitting God who chooses to partner with creation also does something new.

Yes, the Lord can do new thing.

Part 2: Exile to Babylon

In the context of Isaiah, God did send the Hebrew people into exile in Babylon. Because of their many transgressions God sought to withhold his favor from them and allow them to live in exile in Babylon. The prophet Isaiah delivers a message of hope that God would not always be angry with them. In fact, that God would eventually call them back from Babylon and prepare a path for them to return to Jerusalem. We learned through the Book of Ezra and Nehemiah how God rebuilt Jerusalem so these captive people might return. In essence God lowered the mountains and raised the valleys to make the path straight for their return to Jerusalem. Here in Isaiah 43, we see God telling the people through the prophet Isaiah that God is about to do a new thing, he will return the people to a place of honor. God will restore them so that they may sing songs of praise. God will forgive their iniquities for which they were sent into exile. In truth God will do new and glorious things because through this exile experience there has been significant growth.

I often have looked at exile as God's timeout for his people. He sends them off to captivity for a time to think about what they did wrong. That is the way the Babylonian exile has come across to me. Of course, it is so much more. There were many good things that happened in exile. For example, we have the story of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshack, and Abednego. We have Queen Esther. We have Nehemiah and Ezra. The Major and Minor prophets all recount what it meant to be in exile and know serve as lessons we learn in Sunday School today. They teach us about God and the promise of new beginnings, and the hope that it brings.

Part 3: Forget the Former Things and don't Dwell on the Past

In Isaiah 43:18 and 19 we see God's instructions not to dwell on the past. Rather God calls the attention to focus on the new thing the Lord is doing.

I said I would not preach politics from the pulpit. I stand by that. While those of you watching this online will see this on Sunday, this service is pre-recorded before the swearing in of the 46th President of the United States. So I share with you the context of what I am saying in my prayer that our nation will begin move forward. It can be difficult to not dwell on the things of the past. Sometime today around noon the President will be sworn in with the oath of office. And I feel it is truthful to say there is a deep hurt that many of us feel because we acknowledge there is brokenness and division in what is supposed to be a United Nation under God. I want to acknowledge it, rather than gloss over it. And I want to share the following prayer here as it connects to this message of new beginnings.

Prayer:

Our God whom has helped us in ages past. Our hope for years to come. Our shelter from the stormy blast, And our eternal home. Under the shelter of thy throne, they saints have dwelt secure. Sufficient is thine arm alone, and our defense secure. Before the hills in order stood, or earth received her frame. From everlasting Thou art God, to endless years the same. A thousand ages in thy sight, are like an evening gone. Short as the watch that ends the night before the rising sun. Time like an ever rolling stream, bears all its sons away, Thy fly forgotten as a dream dies at the opening day. Our God, our help in ages past, Our hope for years to come. Be thou our grand while troubles last, and our eternal home. Amen.

I am sure you have heard that prayer before. You probably heard it with a beautiful melody. It was written in 1708 by Isaac Watts and is based on the 90th Psalm. It is a reminder that though we may cross through times of challenge that God is our helper. God is our hope for years to come. Whatever challenges we face at this present moment God is with us to help us through it. God gives us the hope to look forward. And when necessary the Lord does tell us when it is a time to do a new thing.

We must acknowledge the mistakes of the past, but we must also move forward when necessary knowing this may be a time when the Lord is doing a new thing. I dare say as we come out of the experiences of this past year, this past decade, this past century, and even this past millennium that we are on the dawn of a new era. Our world will forever be changed by what we have all been through in response to a global pandemic. Additionally, we must recognize the injustice of the practice of bondage that was adopted through the abomination of slavery. We cannot ignore the cries of those who have been oppressed far too long by systemic

racism. There is a movement to right the injustices of the past. We cannot build up mountains or deepen valleys that divide when the Lord says he is making the path straight. (That deserves an Amen). Change is coming. Can you see what the Lord was speaking through Isaiah to Israel? “See I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?” (Isaiah 43:19).

Conclusion:

I want to leave you with this. Politics aside, movement names aside, who is President aside; we all need to look to God to be our source of help so that we may find hope in the years to come. God is steadfast as a rock and yet flowing like a river. God does not change, yet God can bring about change when it is necessary. If we place our higher faith in man-made institutions, we will always come up wanting. It is only the Lord who can provide living water that satisfies our thirst. This is not the time for a revolution, this is a time for a great awakening. We must open our eyes to see what this new thing the Lord is doing and open our hearts to receive it. That is my prayer for this time of new beginnings. And may all God’s people say “AMEN”!