

## A New Way

Lent 5C

Isaiah 43:16-21 (John 12:1-8)

### Slide 1: Winter Scene

Some of my favorite Old Testament verses were read this morning:

*“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 have always thought that these verses from Isaiah would make a perfect reading for a wedding. No wedding couple ever took me up on it, but I think it's perfect.

### Slide 2 : Wedding Rings

Imagine this read at a wedding. There the couple stands with all of their relatives and friends, about to make vows of faithfulness before God, and they enter something that is completely new, a path that has yet to be trod, to step into a future that is unknown. Even if a couple has been together for years

before their wedding day, anyone who is married will tell you that there is something new about that wedding day, that a marriage is about to be embarked upon. And, like today's lovely words from the prophet Isaiah about streams in a wilderness, A wedding is a perfect example of entering a wilderness, too – a beautiful one – but a wilderness nonetheless, in that there is nothing tame about it, nothing safe at all.

The couple making promises to each other agrees to do this new thing together. It's the best example of excellent risk taking that I can think of. People may even say it's crazy to make life long promises such as these, the kind that God would make. It's beautiful but also a wilderness walk.

### Slide 3: tulips and sun

*“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?”*

It is a beautiful image of God doing a new thing, but it is also a strange thing, too. Do not remember the *former* things, God says. That's not what psychologists and counselors recommend. We have a word for people who are unwilling to remember former things in their past. It's called denial. Denial is not a quality you generally want in a person. People who are in denial are like ostriches who stick their head in the sand. A person in denial usually says, "Everything's fine" when it isn't.

Do not remember the *former* things. Our historians and theologians would tell us otherwise, too. To not remember our history and where we came from would perhaps doom us to repeat our mistakes, as if we are in denial about learning from them. Who would want to see us enter another crusade on religious principles again? Or the holocaust? Who would not want to learn from their history so that we may spare not only ourselves, but future generations? So, do not remember *former* things?

How are we to think about that?

#### **Slide 4: Wedding**

For me today, this makes the image of a wedding couple making their first steps in commitment together all the more helpful. Everything is new to a newly married couple, or at least the intent is that it should be. A new thing is *every day* for someone newly married as I think back to my own first years. You have a new spouse, a new place to live, new families to figure out, new duties, new habits to get used to and sometimes tolerate. For me, it's hard to even look back and remember those first feelings of newness. I can't even really remember the former things.

But, it's not just newlyweds. Once you make a change, it's hard to remember when that new city was new to you, that new house, that new job. No matter how much the media tries to convince us, there really isn't anything that is new to us much anymore. Once we get settled in...we get settled in,

don't we? Remembering the *former* things then becomes "What former things? Hasn't it always been like this?"

### **Slide 5 : Blank**

Maybe then, God isn't encouraging denial. God is encouraging instead renewal. Notice the word renewal has the word new in it? Too, it would be helpful to look at the word "**New**" in this **Old** Testament reading. What does God want us to focus upon? Well, my Hebrew rather stinks I'm afraid, but I was able to glean one thing from this word "new" which in the Hebrew is "Chadash". Chadash is translated as "new" but the spirit of the word is there is renew, restore, or revitalize. God is looking to restore us. The *former* things lead us then to a path where we were not restored, not renewed, not revitalized. The former things are our old selves, our old sinful shell that God longs to shed from us.

### **Slide 6: Lent**

Today is the fifth Sunday of Lent. The Hosannas are just about on our lips but not yet. We raise our voices to cry, "crucify him" but wait for two more weeks. There is still time to continue our winding our way to a new way, a Lenten spring, a cleansing and renewal. The word Lent actually means "spring" so I like to associate Lent with the image of spring cleaning. We spend six weeks cleaning ourselves up so that we can accept a new thing in our lives. The old is shed as we attempt to let go of those things, fears, and difficulties that have stopped us from accepting the new thing that is happening in our lives or the renewal that God is longing for us.

Sometimes the season of Lent helps us in this spring cleaning. Other times, it doesn't. Are you now, today, perhaps even this moment, able to accept a new thing from God? Or, are you still saddled with the former things? What renewal is in store for you?

### **Slide 7: Renewed**

Ultimately, whether we know it or not, God is restoring us in another, more tangible way. In Christ, God is doing a new thing. The former things have passed away, those former things being captive to sin and death.

And, this new thing is not just something that happened 2,000 years ago on a cross. Christ continues to restore us and make us new daily in the waters of baptism. Each day, we become a new creation as we die to sin and rise to new life. There is a saying, a mantra that I often say to myself at the start of a new day. It says:

*“Every day is a new unfolding of our life in Christ. Surprises are always happening.”*

Still...even if you can't accept that new thing God is trying to do *within* you each day, you can at least accept the new thing God has given *to* you. And, this new thing, this newness of life is sustained through the tangible gift of Christ's body and blood, something you will receive today, this restorative

gift to sustain you, to guide you in the wildernesses each day.

*“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?”*

### **Slide 8: Cherry Blossom**

Have you perceived it? Or are the things of old, the former things, weighing you down? It is a very simple thing, even when very difficult to do. For, beginning something new or allowing a time for restoration means that you may have to give up something old. And no one is more nostalgic for the old than people are. We grow used to the status quo, don't we? Then, before we know it, the former things have trapped us in a life of despondency and apathy to the difficulties and even the suffering around us.

Lent is a time not of giving things up but letting things in. Allow God in, let go of the former things, and let God make something new in you today.

Please pray with me: We offer  
you our present and future,  
loving God: Our longings for  
ourselves and our own, our  
embrace of self-centered  
ambitions, and our  
preparations that belie our  
faith in your tomorrow.  
Take these our thoughts and  
ambitions and re-order them  
that our thoughts may become  
your thoughts, our hopes for  
tomorrow your hopes for our  
world. This we pray, through  
Christ our Lord, Amen.