

5 Lent Yr C, 7/04/2019  
Isa 43:16-21  
Rev. Garth Wehrfritz-Hanson

“I am about to do a new thing”

PRAYER: Prepare our hearts, O God, to accept your Word. Silence in us any voice but your own, that, hearing, we may also obey your will; through Jesus our Cross-bearing Saviour. Amen.

Not too long ago, there was a pastor that had a kitten that climbed up a tree in his backyard, and then was afraid to come down.

The pastor coaxed and offered warm milk, but the kitty would not come down. The tree was not sturdy enough to climb, so the pastor decided that if he tied a rope to his car and drove away so that the tree bent down, he could then reach up and get the kitten.

He did! All the while, checking his progress in the car frequently, he figured if he went just a little bit further, the tree would be bent sufficiently for him to reach the kitten. But as he moved a little further forward, the rope broke.

The tree went "boing!" and the kitten instantly sailed through the air out of sight. The pastor felt terrible.

He walked all over the neighbourhood asking people if they'd seen a little kitten. Nobody had seen a stray kitten. So he prayed, "Lord, I just commit this kitten to your keeping," and went on about his business.

A few days later he was at the grocery store, and met one of his church members. He happened to look into her shopping cart and was amazed to see cat food. Now this woman was a cat hater and everyone knew it, so he asked her, "Why are you buying cat food when you hate cats so much?" She replied, "You won't believe this," and told him how her little girl had been

begging her for a cat, but she kept refusing. Then a few days before, the child had begged again, so the mom finally told her little girl, "Well, if God gives you a cat, I'll let you keep it."

She told the pastor, "I watched my child go out in the yard, get on her knees, and ask God for a cat. And really, Pastor, you won't believe this, but I saw it with my own eyes. A kitten suddenly came flying out of the blue sky, with its paws outspread, and landed right in front of her."

Never underestimate the Power of God.<sup>1</sup>

In our first lesson today, the people of Judah and Jerusalem were living in Babylonian exile. They were likely discouraged, even depressed—thinking that God had abandoned them. Now they would have to spend the rest of their lives in captivity; they would never go back to Judah and Jerusalem again. Such thoughts may even have led some to despair of life altogether.

However, like the cat flying out of the blue sky and landing right in front of that little girl in the story; God was not to be underestimated by the people of Judah and Jerusalem living in Babylonian exile. No! God intervenes. There's a beautiful irony in God's intervention however. First of all, God tells his people to remember the first exodus out of Egyptian slavery. God intervened back then to save his people from the Egyptian army and he gave them a new found freedom—delivering them into the Promised Land. Immediately after God reminds his people of the exodus from Egypt, which the Israelites remembered and honoured by celebrating the Passover every year in perpetuity—God tells them: "Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old." The Revised English Bible translates it with even more emphasis: "Stop dwelling on past events and brooding over days gone by." I think we've all met people who "live in the past" so-to-speak; and perhaps they do this out of a sense of despair about

their present or fear for their future. They want to freeze life in the past and perceive it as the perfect time. They don't want to change, they can't handle anything new. New is bad and threatens them. Or maybe in their deep despair they do not believe something new can come through God's intervention in their lives. Maybe that's why God tells his people in Babylonian exile not to dwell on past events and brood on things gone by. Maybe the immediate past events they experienced in exile were to be forgotten because it kept them crippled in a state of despair. In this state of being, God intervenes and tells them: "I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?"

Oftentimes when I ask some people the question: "What's new with you?" They respond by saying: "Same old, same old." However that is not quite true. For example, according to medical science our skin changes constantly; we continuously shed old cells and grow new ones.

John Henry Newman once said: "To live is to change, to be perfect is to change often." Jewish philosopher, Martin Buber once said: "To be old is a glorious thing when one has not unlearned what it means to begin." And Albert Einstein once said: "The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results." In other words, newness and change, especially if God initiates it, is as constant in life as death and taxes.

God's way of newness often involves dying or death of some kind to bring about something new—as Christians especially during the season of Lent, we are cognizant of that truth. We remember that it was through the suffering and death of Jesus on the cross that brought us new life. Life filled with forgiveness for our sins and the promise of new, resurrection life.

Just as God led the people of Judah and Jerusalem out of their Babylonian captivity and made a new highway for them in the desert and provided life-giving rivers of water to travel through the hot wilderness back home to the Promised Land; so as Christians we are baptized in the life-giving waters uniting us with the death and resurrection of Jesus our Cross-bearing, and Risen Saviour.

God's newness brings new life in the present and hope for the future. That reminds me of the following story: One of the newspapers in Manila [in the Philippines] carried the news that some 3,000 copies of magazines and other reading materials considered pornographic had been confiscated by the Bureau of Customs while about to be smuggled into the country. These materials were to be shredded and turned over to a paper company that would recycle the paper for free and donate the finished product to the Philippine Bible Society, publisher of Bibles and other religious materials.

Isn't it amazing what can be converted into something useful? It is even more awe-inspiring to behold a person [or even a nation] formerly controlled by sin being transformed by the hand of God into vessel[s] fit for holy use!<sup>2</sup>

I [like many of you] am very fond of the past. More than that, I [like you] am very grateful for the past, and for what God has done in the past. However, you and I serve a God who does not rest on his resume. You and I belong to a God who keeps writing new songs. And you and I follow a Lord who tosses the old trophies away, assuring us, "You ain't seen nothing yet!"<sup>3</sup>

So brothers and sisters in Christ, just as God intervened in the story of the little girl to provide her with a cat; just as God intervened to lead the

people of Judah and Jerusalem out of Babylonian exile by providing a highway in the wilderness and rivers of water in the desert; so God through our Suffering Saviour Jesus has lead us from the wilderness of our sin into the Promised Land of forgiveness, grace, and new life through the baptismal waters uniting us with the death and resurrection of Jesus. Each day is a new day; opening the way to new opportunities to learn new things, to meet new people, to take up new challenges by serving others, to keep changing and growing in our faith and in our relationships with Jesus and with others.

Our LORD is speaking to you and I today, promising us, in the words of the Good News Translation: “Watch for the new thing I am going to do. It is happening already—you can see it now!” For that, thanks be to God!

---

<sup>1</sup> “A Story to Live By: The Pastor’s Cat,” at:

<<https://www.sermonsuite.com/storyshare/pastors-cat>>.

<sup>2</sup> Remedios Velasco, “From Trash to Bibles,” devotion for June 29, 2000, at:

<[upperroom.org](http://upperroom.org)>.

<sup>3</sup> David Kalas, “Heisman In The Hudson,” at:

<<https://www.sermonsuite.com/sermonstudio/heisman-hudson>>.