

### MAKING A NEW WAY

Isaiah 43:16-24 March 21, 2010

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Remember how exciting it was when you were a child and got a new pair of shoes? We like getting new things – a new car, new wall paper, new hair cut. New can be exciting.

Sometimes new makes us apprehensive. We are afraid of the outcome of this new thing. The Tennessee Valley Authority was created in 1933. The government would build a series of dams along the Tennessee River. The purpose was to make life better for the people living in the Tennessee Valley. In 1933, it was in sad shape. Much of the land had been farmed too hard for too long – eroding and depleting the soil. Crop yields had fallen along with farm incomes. The best timber had been cut. The TVA project would bring a cheap source of power. It would help with flood control, malaria prevention, and restoration of the soil. It would stop the erosion. The government was about to do a new thing. Many people living in the Tennessee opposed the project. It would flood some land to create lakes. There was a lot unknown about this new thing the government was doing. In the end, the TVA- and to this very day – turned out to be a great help to move the whole area toward a better way of life. The most dramatic change in valley life came from the electricity generated by the dams along the river. Electric light and modern appliances made life easier and farms more productive. And the cheap electricity drew industries into the region that desperately needed jobs. A new thing.

In our Isaiah text for today, the message of hope was proclaimed to suffering exiles in bondage in Babylon. There was little in their present situation to cause them to have hope. Isaiah boldly declares a dramatic change for them. They will be released from bondage and they will return home. Some of the captives had set up shop in Babylon, had learned to “work the system.” They thought they were doing okay. Isaiah’s words of hope and release did not set well with them. But for most of the people in bondage, Isaiah’s message was dramatic. “Thus says the Lord: A straight path will be made through the desert. God is doing a new thing.”

Interesting that many times when we think of the new, we do that by comparing it to the old. Isaiah draws on their memory of the story of the exodus from Egypt. God spoke to Moses: “I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt. I have heard their cries. I know their suffering. I have come down to deliver them.” Exodus from Egypt. Isaiah is reminding them captives in Babylon that in the exodus from Egypt, God did a new thing.

Those in power in Egypt served the interest of the people in charge. But their politics were the politics of oppression and exploitation. “Moses, there will be a new thing.” God will bring an order of justice and compassion. The politics of oppression is over. The power of pharaoh has failed. The empire of Egypt never listened to the cries of the oppressed. God is not just going to move the pieces into a new pattern. God is doing something new. There will be a new community.

Some of us in this room have experienced that very concept. We have seen old practices dismantled. Martin Luther King Jr integrated the lunch counters at Woolworth. The civil rights movement changed the whole system under which the bus lines operated. The God of justice and compassion is doing a new thing.

Sometimes, our way to hope – to the future, may be through memory. It takes time to move from the past. First, some of the past is worth keeping. We need to remember and acknowledge that – be it in our individual lives or in the congregational life of Pilgrim. Not all of who we are, not all of who we were, is bad. A new way will cause us to use what was and is helpful, honest, understanding, caring. Psychologists know you cannot just order a person to move on with their life. We need to find a way to move on to the new day. A part of memory is to name what is left behind. And there are things we need to leave behind.

Isaiah draws on the memory of the past to lead to a new way. God made a way through the sea. God will make a straight road in the desert. The future will not look like the past, or it might look like the past radically reshaped. “Captives, as we move ahead, as we go home, we can be confident of the mercy of God, and we can trust in God’s faithfulness. And we can assume there will be surprises!

This oracle from Isaiah ends with doxology – the praising of God. God’s promises to the captives is that they will live and prosper to praise God.

We are God’s people God’s promises to redeem us. This last verse of our text today reminds us that the one who is bringing us home is the one who made us in the first place. God is the beginning of our journey. And God will be the end of our journey.

One purpose of Lent is to help us as people, as a congregation to remember what God has done. It helps us to anticipate the ever-new thing God is about to do. God is always with us, but God does not always act in the same old way.