

St. Thomas's Episcopal Parish  
Newark, DE  
The Fifth Sunday of Lent – March 13, 2016/Year C  
Isaiah 43:16-21; Psalm 126; Philippians 3:4b-14; John 12:1-8  
The Reverend Paul W. Gennett, Jr.

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*May my words reveal the greater glory of God.*

AMEN

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*“But this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.”*

Paul's words of life and faith frame the doorway into Holy Week. Yet it seems in clear contrast to one of the promises of recovering life from the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous – **“We will not forget the past, nor wish to shut the door on it.”** If I do the soul house cleaning needed that Lent makes space to do, I always unearth something[s] that I SO want to shut the door on, fast, hard, and forever!

This would be my **less-than-what-God-wants-me-to-be** response. By grace I have become less apt to slam this door because it never shuts completely no matter how hard I push. By grace I have learned to **receive and not run away** from those stories of my past actions and events, things done or left undone, said or unsaid. I have come to trust that the Holy One will guide me in the ways I need to deal with what needs to be done with humility, truth, integrity, and love. By doing the holy and whole-making soul work of Lent, I can stand resurrected and renewed at the Cross of Good Friday, and the empty tomb of Easter Day.

By faith, and by opening my heart eyes and ears, I can hear the Holy whisper, sometimes in the breath of sheer silence, **“I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?”**

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Throughout the book of Isaiah assurances like these are often repeated, using different images and metaphors, to describe God's love for them. At the beginning of chapter 43, the Lord spoke through Isaiah saying, *“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine ... you are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you ...”* Hopefully these words sound familiar after eight years together! Today Isaiah uses different images to reassure them that changes are about to become real.

**“We will not forget the past ...”** Isaiah reminds this generation of the great things God did for their ancestors leading them out of Egypt. Now he says God will do it again for you. The Holy One of Israel is able to and will do it. Although this generation was in a different time and place of exile, the Lord will make a way in the wildernesses well as a way through the Red Sea. The

same power of God that parted a way through the sea will create a way in our wilderness as well. Sometimes we believe that God can do some things but **cannot or will not** do other things in our lives. We think, **“I don’t see how God can possibly do this because it is a long standing problem. I cannot see how God can clean up this mess I have made.”** It is important for us to trust our look to the past to see that God was able in similar circumstances to handle the big problems as well as the small ones. We come to realize that God **can and will** handle those impossible situations of our life as well as the easy ones.

Look at some of the previous problems you faced in your life. You may have thought you would never get out of your Egypt or Babylon, but God made a way whether we were aware of it. God speaks and is present **all the time, in all ways and through all people. Can we believe it?**

**“ ... nor wish to shut the door on it.”** Sometimes we forget things so easily while at other times we hang on to things far too long. Isaiah is telling the people **to look back** to how God has helped you in the past, but **do not dwell** in the past. Do you know people who are living their present lives in the past? They talk about the “good old days” as if they are still living at the time when they were right there, not in the present or Presence at all.

Isaiah is saying is **do not forget** the former things, both good and bad, for they can show you how God brought you out of your Egypt and your Babylon then, and help you to make better choices and decisions now and in your future. You learn what works and what does not work. He is saying **do not dwell** on the past to such a degree that you can’t think of anything else.” Recalling past answers to prayer gives you hope for your future. Dwelling on past problems and difficulties does not solve anything. It creates a hindrance to what God desires to do for you and through you in the present.

When electricity was first being introduced to a little rural village almost everybody switched from propane lanterns to electricity as soon as it could be hooked up. However, the oldest couple in the congregation could not get their electricity because they lived deep in the countryside forests. They continued using the propane lanterns. The day finally arrived to bring electricity to their home and everyone came for the festive event. The man waited for it to become really dark and then he flipped on the switch. Light filled the room and everyone rejoiced. The man grinned from ear to ear, picked up the propane lamp and said, **“Now this sure makes lighting my lamps easier.”** And with that he lit a lamp and turned off the electricity.

God invites us, again and again, through the likes of Isaiah and Jesus, to **move on to new things!** Isaiah implores the people to see that spring is ready to burst forth in their lives. He is saying, *“God IS doing a new thing right now. God IS springing up right now. Now IS the time. Grace and hope IS springing up right now!”*

Jesus knows the power of God’s “new thing.” and calls us away from the comfortable faith into the unknown of life and faith, to journey in trust of God and Jesus with all that we have, in all that we do, all of the time. Jesus invites us to walk away from the empty “gods” the world proclaims into true and everlasting refreshment for our soul. In Lent’s wilderness times, we are

now free to meet God and Christ, to leave behind the **should's and must's and have to's** that weigh us down and take away the desired rest for our soul. As Mary anoints Jesus for his journey through the Cross of Good Friday, Jesus anoints us in new life, new hope, and renewed spirit to serve our loving God.

God's "new thing" is sometimes a **strange new thing** to our dulled faith ears and hearts. Yet this most truly is the way of God, the way of Jesus. **Stop ... Look ... Listen** – ***"I am about to do a new thing: now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?"***

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There is another one of those "sayings" in the rooms of recovery that goes, **"Keep coming back and watch for the miracle that will happen in you."** The life of faith is like this as well, an invitation to LIVE the ordinary of our days ever being aware of the EXTRAORDINARY that can happen in you, now.

Spring brings the rebirth of nature and new beginnings. The crocus that blankets the Grove breaks through the ground with purple blooms. Bright yellow daffodils open in a blast of color to freshen our lives from the drear and drab of our wintery souls. Dogwoods and redbuds begin to bloom, and birds return in the early morning to greet us with song. Our spiritual life will be renewed in the same way.

*"Do you not perceive it,"* asks Isaiah? **Be open** to perceive God working in your life. **Look** for spring and do not live in the past. **Thank God now** for doing a "new thing" in your life, whatever it may be and wherever it may lead. **Expect the miracle** that you are of Love's creation to spring forth and burst out all new, fresh, and faithful now, and always.

***AMEN***