

Lament to Hope: God is up to something...New!
Psalm 98, Isaiah 43:14-21, 2 Cor. 5:16-19

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Psalm 98

**¹Sing to the LORD a new song,
for he has done marvelous things;
his right hand and his holy arm
have worked salvation for him.**

²The LORD has made his salvation known
and revealed his righteousness to the nations.

**³He has remembered his love
and his faithfulness to Israel;
all the ends of the earth have seen
the salvation of our God.**

⁴Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth,
burst into jubilant song with music;

⁵make music to the LORD with the harp,
with the harp and the sound of singing,

⁶with trumpets and the blast of the ram's horn—
shout for joy before the LORD, the King.

⁷Let the sea resound, and everything in it,
the world, and all who live in it.

⁸Let the rivers clap their hands,
let the mountains sing together for joy;

⁹let them sing before the LORD,
for he comes to judge the earth.

He will judge the world in righteousness
and the peoples with equity.

Isaiah 43: 14-21

¹⁴This 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.

¹⁵I am the LORD, your Holy One,
Israel's Creator, your King.”

¹⁶This is what the LORD says -
he who made a way through the sea,

a path through the mighty waters,
¹⁷who 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:

¹⁸**“Forget the former things;**

do not dwell on the past.

¹⁹**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.**

²⁰The 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,
²¹the people I formed for myself
that they may proclaim my praise

2 Corinthians 5:16-19

¹⁶So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. ¹⁷**Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!** ¹⁸All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

PRAY

In a Peanuts comic strip, Peppermint Patty is seated at her desk in school, chatting with Franklin, the student seated in front of her.

In the first frame, Peppermint Patty muses: “We all need hope, Franklin. Did you know that? And we all need memories...without good memories, life can be pretty skungie...”

Franklin replies: I had three good memories once...but I forgot what they were!”

I would agree with Peppermint Patty: We all need hope and we all need good memories. I think Charles Shultz, the creator of Peanuts, was onto something here. What is the relationship between hope and memory?

In this present moment, the past is a memory: What we ate for breakfast this morning, the activities we engaged in yesterday. For most of us memory extends back to our childhoods. We have memories of our family of origin, of classmates, and so on up to the present. Memories may include loss and regrets, as well as joys and accomplishments.

When we remember how God sustained us through some difficult times in the past, it gives us hope as we anticipate the future - that God will show up in sunshine and rain - during the good and the tough times - to do what God does: love us and redeem us.

The Psalmist invites us to sing a new song. What shall we sing about? The marvelous things that God has done - the primary marvel being the salvation that God has provided for all people. We must remember those to sing about them. And in the act of remembering and singing about God's marvelous actions in the past, it gives us hope as we face an unknown and uncertain future!

In recent weeks we have been considering how biblical lament gives voice to our deepest longings during a time of deep distress and yes, during this pandemic. We observe some parallels with Israel's experiences in exile and our current situation. It seems as if we ourselves are in exile, as we continue 6 months into self-isolating, and taking other precautions to stem the tide of Covid19.

We have asked with the psalmist: How long, O Lord?

We have wondered with the psalmist: How can we sing the Lord's songs in a strange land?

We have been encouraged to pray - with complete honesty and transparency, knowing God can handle whatever we offer.

We have been reminded that when words fail us, we have a personal prayer partner in the person of the Holy Spirit, who intercedes for us with "groans and sighs too deep for words".

And throughout these messages we have been continually and repeatedly reminded of God's unfailing [hesed] mercy, compassion, and love that is lavished upon us.

While the people of Israel were in captivity - once in Egypt, later in Babylon, each time their exile came to an end. Thus, pandemic will end. Eventually. From Egypt they eventually entered the promised land. From Babylon, they returned to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem.

While this pandemic is grinding on...

We pray for those ill with the virus, and for those whose family members have died.
We pray daily for our medical personnel on the front lines.
We pray for scientists working to develop treatments and vaccines.
We continue to live faithfully as Jesus' disciples, to worship, learn and serve our community.

We may well yearn for the way things used to be, but there is no going back. Just as the people of Israel returned to Jerusalem, the city was fundamentally different, and they were not the same people.

In a similar way for us, there is no going back to a "pre-pandemic normal". Sadly not. But there will be a "*new normal*".

As we move into the "new normal":

I wonder...how have you and I changed during this season of pandemic? How are we different?

What do we value differently now than we did before?

Are there things we once took for granted that we now treasure?

And the opposite - Are there things we once treasured that seem to have lost value for us during this time?

I know this for sure, God's people (then and now) are resilient. We can persevere in the present and have hope for the future because our God is in the business of making all things new!

God speaks through the prophet Isaiah, reminding the people of his mighty acts in the past (v.16-17) making a way of escape on dry land through the parted Red Sea as the Israelites fled the tyranny of Pharaoh. The implication in what follows, it is as if God is saying: "*If you thought the past was good, just wait and see what I'll do next!*"

¹⁸**Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past.**

¹⁹**See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?**

Two points here:

1. We are told by God, to "*forget the former things and not dwell on the past*". Nostalgia is one thing, but sometimes we can get stuck. We have difficulty accepting change. That is part and parcel of being human. But the past is past. It is not healthy to hold onto it too tightly.

The Hebrews got into trouble with this after their Exodus from Egypt. They wandered in the wilderness for 40 years - a whole generation because they could not let go of the past. While God provided food for them to eat, shoes that did not wear out, etc. they still yearned for “the good ‘ole days” back in Egypt! What?!? Did their memories not serve them well enough to remember the hardships, the back-breaking work and poor treatment they received as slaves? What part of being slaves was a good thing?? You see, this is where memory may be a problem. They had selective memory! God knew this so God says, in effect, “*Forget it. Move on! The past is just that. It is past!*”

2. “*See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?*”

In this context, God is about to act again, as the Hebrews are released from exile in Babylon and must travel again through the desert. This time God will do the opposite: Provide rivers and streams of water amid the wasteland. (God accomplishes the same act of deliverance through a reversal of the means of deliverance!)

This new thing that God is doing, is unexpected. Unprecedented. In liberating them once from slavery in Egypt, they escaped on dry land through the parted waters of the Red Sea. Now they will escape captivity in Babylon, but this time God will supply rivers of water in the desert. In both instances, the desert is still there, but so is God’s presence and blessing. Yes, the pandemic is still here. We have not yet reached the “new normal” but God’s mercies are new each and every day, in every way.

Again, the implication? It is as if God is saying: “*If you thought the past was good, just wait and see what I’ll do next!*”

God’s greatest act of liberation is exemplified in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Paul writes about this act of reconciliation which not only liberates us from the consequences of sin and death but makes of us new creations in Christ. We are fundamentally changed, forgiven, freed from a past of enslavement to sin and self. We are, through the redeeming love of God, made new creations in Christ. The old is gone. The past no longer has a hold on us. We are empowered by God’s Spirit to live into this new reality of reconciled relationships!

God is not bound or limited by time, nor is God limited by our sin. God is an ever-present help! God is in the ongoing process of making all things new, and recreating you and me, as free and forgiven. God’s mercies are new each day, in every way.

I think these passages are invitations to live expectantly. What does it mean to live expectantly?

A widowed father with a young son decided to plan a picnic. This would be a first for the two of them. The evening before they got their supplies and food prepared. The boy was tucked into bed but tossed and turn. He ran into his father's room and awakened him. "I can't sleep Daddy! I'm excited about tomorrow."

The father replied, "It's going to be a great day, but it won't unless we get our rest. Go back to bed now." So, the boy went back to bed. An hour later he still could not sleep so he ran in and woke his father up a second time.

"What's the matter now?" the father asked.

"Daddy, I just want to thank you for tomorrow!"

That is what it means to live expectantly!

It means being able to trust God implicitly: trusting that the past was good, but the future will be even better.

It means to be grateful for the past, while living in hope that God will indeed do new things *in us, through us, and among us!*

To live expectantly means to be paying attention, to be always on the look - out. "*Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?*"

We must be living expectantly, because often "new things" start very small. As small as a seed. A thought. A single conversation. From there they grow into something of significance because God is the One giving the growth and creating a new, hope-filled future!

I want to challenge each one of us to be thinking and praying about the following:

- **How is God using the pandemic to re-shape and re-new me as Christ's disciple?**
- **What new thing is God calling Calvary to be and do in this season of our life together?**
- **What new thing does the community of Enumclaw need, that only Calvary is in a position to provide?**

I'd be very interested in hearing your responses to these questions.

Let's pray.

Romans 15:13 New International Version (NIV)

¹³May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.