

Today's Isaiah 43 makes a startling directive: *Do not remember the former things. I am about to do a new thing.* To be sure, saying "Do not remember former things" isn't a negation of the value of memory. Earlier, Isaiah called just for that: "Remember your history – how God led you out of bondage. How God has always been with you." Remembering builds trust for the future.

But today, Isaiah shifts, "Remember not the former things." Move from remembering to anticipating! Eugene Peterson's version *The Message* says, "Be alert, be present. I'm about to do something brand-new. I'm making a river in the badlands."

The call is to be alert and present to this moment, so we don't miss what's unfolding. To anticipate is to live in openness. To be here. Isaiah 43 calls us to NOW.

Professor Joe Evenson taught religion at Cal Lutheran University for years and had a love for this book of Isaiah. He wrote a commentary *Isaiah: Hope in a War-Weary World*. Dr. Evenson is a professor with a pastoral heart, and he writes:

"No one can dictate or guess how long a person or community should or will mourn the death of a loved one, or any major separation. Grief runs its own course. "And" Evenson notes, "for many, a time does come when memories are overtaken by hope" for the future too.

Today's text is audacious with its hope because it sees God bringing an awesome future where no challenge is too much, no obstacle too big, no river too deep, no desert too dry, no human too broken, no wild animal too fierce.

Isaiah 43 is a scripture to turn to when we feel the world crashing in, when our spirits are discouraged, when we can't imagine a future that has a chance of being good. Isaiah 43 is for when dullness sets in, when things feel deprived of meaning, when we're faced with the mess we make of things, and worse, when we know how incapable we are of fixing our messes, including fixing ourselves.

Isaiah 43 speaks from a context of helpless disorientation. Like on a morning when there are 4 mass shootings in a span of 6 hours. Like in a season when wars rise up making the innocent flee. From such a place of disarray, Isaiah still sides with hope, announces a future so reliable we can respond with praise even before it comes to pass.

Isaiah 43 was written to a people still exiled, longing for former days. They weren't out of harm's way yet. Exile wasn't good and they weren't imagining any good coming because their past still loomed large. Isaiah knew this because this was him, too.

The poet who wrote Isaiah 43 was a part of this same exiled community consumed by all they'd been forced to leave behind. It was painful. They'd woke up in the morning, but not with any anticipation of good. How could anything ever be good again? That was the sense of the day.

And into this space, Isaiah speaks in the middle of his long book. These mid chapters are called Deutero-Isaiah, 2<sup>nd</sup> Isaiah. Chapters 40 – 55 with 43 right in there. The faithing community stands knee deep in exile, far from home, entrenched in disequilibrium. And from there Isaiah expounds with hope. *God is about to do a new thing. Now it springs forth. Do you not perceive it?*

Isaiah urges trust because God is love and love holds the future. The bold poet envisions a future of unsurpassed good because God, who is love, is at work. Isaiah urges us and his first readers, to live as though we believe God is capable of love against all odds.

And there's more, Isaiah says. This new thing God is doing is greater than what God has done before. In the past, God parted waters temporarily so those in bondage walked on dry ground to freedom. The waters stayed parted only till the oppressed were free. The sea then again crashed in upon itself.

Now, the new God is doing, Isaiah 43 says, is cosmically different. It's a massive change of order – not just an exit out of a bad situation. It's a transformation of the situation itself.

Isaiah 43 speaks of God making streams flow in deserts, wild animals living in peace, all of life flourishing with crescendos of praise.

God's new thing isn't just restoration. It's reorientation to where creation will finally fulfill God's dream – where, as Julian of Norwich intuited, *all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well*. Julian wrote those anticipatory words during the crushing days of the Black Plague.

Having this passage from Isaiah 43 appointed at this time of global pain is another testimony of the Living nature of God's Word. Isaiah 43:16-21 is this week's *Word to Savor All Week Long*. I hope we will sit with these words more than this morning. Take it into your week.

Join us if you can for one hour this Thursday evening. It's our final Lenten Thursday with *Lectio Divina*. We'll hear Isaiah 43 read three times, listening for what stands out to us. It's been a rich time. If you haven't been able to yet, you are welcome.

We can wonder where hope lies in the ups and downs of life. We can be frightened with people and nations under brutal attack. We can question where hope is for our at-risk creation.

Isaiah 43 is a witness to our war-weary and personally weary world, that weariness is temporary – though it may not seem so. The Biblical view is that God has in mind rivers in deserts, love being eternal, creation declaring God's praise.

Our *Song to Sing All Week Long* is printed with the Order of Worship. *Streams in the Desert*. May we sing and live as though we trust it is true.

Amen

+Pastor Peg Schultz-Akerson, in anticipation of God's fresh presence this day!  
LCM, LA