Scripture Reading

Isaiah 43:16-21 NIV

16 This is what the LORD says—
he who made a way through the sea,
a path through the mighty waters,

17 who 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 desert
and streams in the wasteland.

20 The wild animals honor me,
the jackals and the owls,
because I provide water in the desert
and streams in the wasteland,
to give drink to my people, my chosen,

21 the people I formed for myself
that they may proclaim my praise.

<u>Message</u>

"Ain't Seen Nothing Yet!"

The Lord God say, "Behold, I make all things new."

That phrase is found throughout the whole Bible. In Isaiah 43, we hear that phrase again that God makes all things new. The New English Bible translation of Isaiah 43 reads

"Don't brood over past history. Don't brood over the mistakes of the years gone by. I the Lord God am doing a new thing in your life. Can't you see it? Can't you perceive it? It is like a bud springing forth from the ground. It is like a small crocus poking its head through the dirt. I the Lord God am doing a new thing in your life. Don't you see it? Don't brood over past history or things gone by."

That same theme is found in the Book of Revelation, chapter 21. Some of our women who studied Revelation this year may remember that in the fourth chapter of Revelation, we find God described for the first time. God is sitting on a throne. It is a beautiful throne made out of carnelian, jasper, and emerald. Over that throne was an emerald-like rainbow. God is sitting silently on that throne. Surrounding God are the twenty-four elders, the twelve tribes of the Old Testament and the twelve apostles of the New Testament. Surrounding them are the cherubim and seraphim. All of them are raising their hands and wings in praise, all singing together, "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty; who was and is and is to come!"

It is a magnificent scene. But God doesn't say a thing. God is silent. Then come all the plagues of the world, but God is still silent. Finally, at the end of the book, Satan

is thrown into the abyss, and God still does not say a word; he does not open his mouth. God sits silently on that throne until you come to chapter twenty-one. You come to the end of the book and God gets ready to speak. God draws in a breath and everything goes silent. Everything is quiet. God draws in a deep breath and says, …

Revelation 21:5

…"Look, I am making everything new!"….

This theme that is presented so conspicuously in the Book of Revelation; the same theme that is found in the book of Isaiah, is a theme which is woven throughout the whole Bible. God says,

- "I will make a new covenant with you.
- I will place in you a new heart.
- I will give you a new spirit.
- I will give you a new name.
- You will sing a new song.
- I will give you new wine."
- And as we heard last week in the context of God's act of reconciliation; our restored relationship with God thru Christ, the Apostle Paul stated the same theme in 2 Corinthians, "If anyone is in Christ Jesus, they are a new creation. The old has passed away; the new has come."

Some of you know the famous American theologian Paul Tillich. From one of his sermons published in a book called, The New Beginning, He stated,

"If you want to summarize the message of the Christian faith,
you can summarize it in two words. It is the message of the…new creation.

Paul Tillich, The New Beginning

God who sat upon the throne said, "Look, I am making everything new!"….

But, what does that mean exactly?

The Greek word for "new"(*Kainos*) means "new in character". **(Rev. 21:1-5**) It denote "new in kind" not just "another". We are not dealing here with the "brand new" but with that which has undergone a radical renewal. God has the ability to create something new out of nothing. The witness offered in the Book of Genesis is that by His Word alone God brought into being that which had not existed. God can create the "new", that is the "brand new", but the theme throughout the scriptures is not that God throws out the old and starts afresh, but that he takes that which is old, worn out, broken, dirty, cracked and seemingly useless, and He makes it new!

As one preacher proclaimed, God is the "Junk Man"; He is the renovator and the restorer. This characteristic was presented well by Warren Wirsbe in his book, Be Victorious, when he compared the first and last books of the Bible; Genesis & Exodus:

Genesis	**Revelation**
Heaven & Earth created 1:1	New Heavens & Earth 21:1
Sun created 1:16	No need of the sun 21:23
The night established 1:5	No night there 21:5
The seas created 1:10	No more seas 21:1
The curse announced 3:14-17	No more curse 22:3
Death entered history 3:19	No more death 21:4
Mankind driven from the tree 3:24	Mankind restores to paradise 22:14
Sorrow & Pain begin 3:17	No more tears or pain 21:4

Source: Wiersbe, Warren W. Be Victorious, Victor Books 1985, p. 145

" Look", says God in Revelation and in numerous places in Isaiah, "I am making everything new": "I am doing a new thing!"

In Isaiah, God had been watching over his people who had spent the last 70 years in exile in Babylon. Generations ago, the wickedness of God's people living in

the southern Kingdom of Judah had finally tipped the scales. The northern kingdom of Israel had been defeated years ago and the people scattered never to return. But now the Babylonians had taken over Judah and God was going to allow them to win Jerusalem and take God's people away to a foreign. During their 70 years of exile generations had been born and grew up who never knew the glory that was once Jerusalem or the beauty of God's temple built by Solomon. In fact, few of the remaining Jews in exile remembered life when they lived peacefully in their own land.

But, God had given Isaiah a message of hope, a reminder that he was a God who makes all things new. He reminded them of what he had done in the past. Throughout the words of Isaiah God's people are reminded that;

- not only had God created them and form them into a nation, He had also redeem them and called them His own.
- He reminded them that he had also redeemed them from Egypt; making a way for them through the sea while extinguishing the mighty nation pursuing them.

And yet, even as God reminded them of might acts of salvation in the past, he exhorts them "

18 *"Forget the former things;*
do not dwell on the past.
19 *See, I am doing a new thing!*

I really love the New Living Translation here:

Isaiah 43:18-19 NLT

But forget all that—
it is nothing compared to what I am going to do.
For I am about to do something new.

In short….**You ain't seen nothing yet!!**

God was about to deliver them again. This time instead of traveling east from Egypt they would be traveling west from the Persian Empire. This time instead of

fleeing, they would be set free, even allowed to stay if they wish, but if they went they went with gifts to make their return easier. Something new indeed was happening as God once again saved his people, but that would still only be the beginning of a much greater and universal plan of salvation.

This is a story told over and over again in the Scriptures; human sin, oppression caused by sin, followed by God's salvation. Unfortunately the story keeps cycling because though people are drawn back to God as his salvation revealed, eventually people sin again. We are very fortunate that our God is a forgiving God, a merciful God whose love never ends. “God is great and God is good”, and as we walk with Jesus in this season of Lent, we are reminded just how much it cost our great & good God to free us from that very sin which kept enslaving us to a vicious cycle of sin and oppression.

(Newness of Individuals affects the Group)

While the biblical record often speaks of the newness that God creates in his people**, at the very heart of the newness of a people we find the newness he brings to individuals**. For just as the newness we witnessed in the apostle Paul's life had a powerful effect in shaping God's people known as Christians, so too we celebrate the newness God gives to each one of us and the effect that our newness will have upon our church, our neighborhood, our community and our world.

As you ponder the process of newness which God brings about in you, I encourage you to liken it to the process of refinishing furniture. Again, when we talk about God making all things new we are not talking about crafting a new table out of raw materials, rather we are talking about God taking what some might call “junk” and making it new.

A couple years ago we received a call from the Assemblies of God church which had purchased our former church on Grant Street. They had moved from Grant Street long ago and were now in the process of Moving again. In that move they ran across something very old that belonged to us; a short painted table, a table we perhaps had forgotten in the attic of our former Grant Street church.

When we received it back from our brothers and sisters, we noticed that it was white on one side with Swedish words inscribed on the front. Those of us who saw it came to the conclusion that it must have been a communion table once used by the early Swedes of his congregation, but eventually replaced for one reason or another; it had become "junk" up in the attic

Now if you want to see this white Swedish communion table you'll have to go over to Dick & Vivian Mattson's house. For there, it will be restored someday, but as you may know, if you have ever restored furniture, restoration can be quite a long and difficult process.

Perhaps the first thing you would need to do when restoring let's say this table, is simply to clean it; to wipe off the grease and grime and dust that has settled on the for years.

Then, though it may look much better you forge ahead, and you begin to strip away the paint. And maybe then you discover that the white paint covers green paint which covers blue paint which covers red paint. You really don't know what you're getting yourself into until you begin the process.

When we come to faith in Christ and give our lives to God to be made new, many of us expect a quick cleaning… a little 401 and a paper towel and it will be cleaned. But that's not where God stops. When God makes us new He is not satisfied to simply wipe away our "surface sins". God knows what lies deep down inside of us. God knows the potential we have, much more than we will ever know it. So maybe after an initial cleaning, God begins to strip off the paint knowing very well that beneath the first coat he will find a second coat and a third and maybe even the fourth. And then, like a

thorough furniture refinisher, God gets down to the wood and discovers as Dick Mattson has discovered, this old dirty white Swedish table was made of mahogany! Who would've thought? Who would have remembered that?

So maybe we allow God to strip away those layers that were hiding the original beauty He created in us, a beauty that reveals our Creator when others look at us. We allow it, though the process is painful as God's strip away the many layers of sin which had come to define our life; addictions, mean-spiritedness, unfaithfulness, passive-aggressiveness, apathy… and maybe we are a whole lot better off than we were 20 years ago. But are we done? Has God completed his work in us?

No way. Don’t believe it. And you ain’t seen nothing yet!

God still has a lot of sanding to do, to bring out your beauty. And maybe, once all the paint has been removed, there is some marks/wounds on you that need special attention before your wood is finally stained and sealed to show off and protect your beauty for the praise of God.

When we liken God's work of making us new; of taking what some may call "junk" and revealing for all to see the beauty he placed in us from the beginning of time, I think we get a pretty accurate perception of life, of struggles which strengthen our faith, and challenges which strip away all that which has enslaving us.

I am excited about what God is doing with me, and I'm excited about what God is doing with you because I know that as God works on us as individuals he is also working on us as a family of faith.

This biblical theme which we see running from Genesis through Revelation, and we see in the Prophet Isaiah's words for the people of God at a specific point in their history, tells us that **we must not fear change, because God wants us to change.** In order to make us new we need to be constantly changing; not as the world wants us to

change, but in ways we must change in order to face our changing world with the good news of Jesus.

Think about the change that Jesus described when he dialogued with the Samaritan woman at the well.

John 4:19-24

19"Sir," the woman said, ……. 20Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem."

21Jesus declared, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem….. a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. 24God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."

Warren Wiersbe writes that

"The Bible gives an interesting record of the dwelling places of God. First, God walked with man in the Garden of Eden. Then he dwelt with Israel in the tabernacle and later the Temple. When Israel sinned, God had to depart from those dwellings. Later, Jesus came to earth and "tabernacled' (dwelt) among us (John 1:14). Today, God does not dwell in man-made temples (Acts 7:48-50), but in the bodies of His people (1 Cor. 6:19-20) and in the church (Eph. 2:21-22). Citation: Wiersbe, Warren W. Be Victorious, Victor Books 1985, p.146-7

There are changes we must experience and endure together. Jesus taught his disciples that;

Luke 5:37-38

….no one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the new wine will burst the skins, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. 38No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins.

In the process of making all things new, we cannot fear change because God's change is good, and those changes are described for us in the Bible. And we can face those changes knowing that God is making us new. When we know who we are; Children of God, and we know that our character traits are well-defined for us as we look at and listen to Jesus, and yield ourselves to the power of His Spirit…. **then all we need to be concerned with is becoming who God is making us to be**. Perhaps you remember another prophet, hundreds of years before Jesus' days on earth, who spoke of God's renewing agenda:

Malachi 3:1-3a

1 "See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the LORD Almighty.

2 But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap. 3 He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver.

So when do we know when God's work of renewal is done? Jesus showed us that too. In just a couple weeks we will be singing again of Jesus' resurrection. Jesus, the firstborn of many from the dead… a new resurrected being; somewhat different, but still bearing the marks of love, the nail markings in His hands and feet.

For you see, we too, like Jesus, will be raised again and made new, not only spiritually but physically as well, yet without loss of individual identity.

"Behold", says God, "I make all things new."

This morning I want to leave you with the challenge which comes from our Orthodox Christian brothers and sisters. For us, the time of Lent is a time to

contemplate our Lord's suffering. It is for some an opportunity to endure suffering of some kind in order to better relate with our Lord's journey to the cross.

But, for **Orthodox Christians, Lent is viewed as a tithe of the year**. Literally, it is almost 1/10 of the days in a year. And in the spirit of tithing to the Lord, Orthodox Christians celebrate Lent as a time to seriously live as one ought to live as a Christian. You hear what I'm saying?

What would it be like to focus your obedience to God's teachings and Christ's example in every aspect of your life for 40 days straight? What a challenge, what a great idea. What do you think would happen in your life if you focus your obedience to live as Christ lived during Lent?

I think in many ways such a Lenten goal would achieve for us what the law was intended to achieved for the Jewish people; it would teach us first and foremost of our brokenness and of our need for God's forgiveness and grace and salvation. It would be a humbling experience indeed!

But if we did this.. even over these final weeks of Lent, my guess is that you would, as I would discover, some of those unfinished patches where God still needs to do a bit more stripping & scraping, sanding, staining and sealing.

Do you think you've arrived? Are you a finished product?

You ain't seen nothing yet!

Out of love God makes all things new.. including you, including me. So, let us work with Him, stretch our faith, heed His Word, be guided by his Spirit, and rejoice as we get closer to that finished product God is making you and me (and us) to be. AMEN

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