

Sermon Draft for April 6, 2025

Text: Isaiah 43:16–21

Sermon: “A New Thing”

In our text for this Sunday, God puts Himself on trial in order to demonstrate to His people that He is their only qualified deliverer. He is Israel’s God and He alone orders and controls the world’s affairs. In the first part of our text, He is reminding them how He has created them, established them, and watches over them.

It is true that He is discipling them, but the discipline does not disprove His ability to bring them into better days. His devotion to them never wavers. He asserts that His acts in the past (the Exodus) are proof He is able and will deliver them again. God is faithful to His people no matter what, and no matter how bad it gets.

Verse 19 is key to developing the gospel proclamation of this sermon. The “new thing” God does is He gives His own Son for us at Calvary. Isaiah speaks of “the way” God sets in the desolate place.

He describes it as a life-giving stream which will flow, ultimately, from the riven side of Jesus in the water and the blood of the crucified Messiah. This reminds us of the waters of baptism and the blood for the sacrifice that marks us at the new Passover of the Lord's Supper. God's acts of deliverance in the past will be done again in Jesus. God always acts for the blessing and benefit of His people.

The temptation of Israel was to doubt God. They were tempted and tried. But God speaks of a day that is coming where even the jackals and other desert dwelling creatures will see the glory of God and praise Him (verse 20).

The Fifth Sunday in Lent draws us closer to Calvary; it serves as something of a prelude to Holy Week. The God who delivered Israel through the Red Sea (Isaiah 43:16–17) is now doing a “new thing” in his ultimate exodus from the Egypt of sin and death by way of the cross and open tomb.

Purchased and won by the blood of the Lamb to be his own, God's people press forward, confident in Christ's righteousness alone (Philippians 3:8–9, 12). The One who is the rightful heir of the vineyard is cast out and murdered, yet in the economy of the Father, this Christ rejected by the would-be architects and builders of Israel is the cornerstone (Luke 20:17, Gospel).

The apostle Paul writes, ***“For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through . . . the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope”*** (Romans 15:4).

This being the case, we do not regard our Old Testament Reading as merely a story—a true story, to be sure—about how God dealt with Israel in forgiving their unfaithfulness and rescuing them from their Babylonian captors. It was put in writing for us and about us.

Even better, it is about the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, who is also our Creator and King. He is the Lord Jesus Christ who does a new thing in this old world.

The old saying goes that there is nothing new under the sun. Sin is inclusive, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. The words of Martin Franzmann's hymn ring true: ***"In Adam we have all been one, One huge rebellious man; We all have fled that evening voice That sought us as we ran"*** (LSB 569:1).

Just as no one is excluded from sin, so also there is no escaping death, for wherever there is sin there is death. When it comes to sin and death, there is nothing new in this old world.

Our text announces to us that the Lord does a new thing. ***"Behold, I am doing a new thing,"*** says the Lord (v 19). It is to him that we turn our hearts and minds.

Who is this Lord who is doing a new thing? He is the Creator. He has brought all things into existence by his mighty Word. He knows all about new things, for everything he once made dazzling new. He is the one who could challenge Job:

“Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? . . . determined its measurements. . . . shut in the sea with doors, . . . and prescribed limits for it, . . . and said, ‘Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stayed’?” (Job 38:4–5, 8, 10–11).

He sustains the world of nature, exercising his dominion over wind and wave. He is the Redeemer. *“Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine”* (43:1). Israel was unfaithful to God’s covenant, but God in his mercy remained true to his promise and continually rescued her from the hands of her enemies.

God’s new thing is something greater than the exodus. The exodus from Egypt was the great and foundational event of God’s redeeming mercy in the Old Testament (vs 16–17). Israel rightly looked back on the exodus. That’s the purpose of Passover, remembering what God has done. But God’s deliverance was not confined just to Israel’s past; there is more to come.

God's new thing was also his gathering a destitute and dispirited people exiled from Jerusalem. God's deliverance of Judah from the Babylonian exile was an exodus-like miracle. God had preserved Israel in the wilderness during the years of wandering prior to their being given the Promised Land. Now Isaiah describes how the wilderness will be a place of renewed life (vs 19–20).

But God's new thing was even greater than either the exodus or the homecoming from Babylonian exile; it was Christ Jesus. Both of these events bear witness to Christ and point to his coming. His coming will be a deliverance from bondage to sin and captivity to death.

His coming will not result in a geographical homecoming; instead, we will be at home with our Father forever through his reconciling work on the cross.

God's new thing elects a chosen people for himself. By a gracious miracle, God elected Israel. By a gracious miracle in Christ, God elected you and me.

God's new thing creates a people who declare his praise (v 21). We have not been created for self-praise but for the praise of God's glory in Christ: ***"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light"*** (1 Peter 2:9).

So we confess in the Second Article of Luther's Small Catechism, ***"I believe that Jesus Christ . . . has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death, that I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity."***

God has made you his own. You belong to him who has called you by name in Holy Baptism. We are not yet living in that new heaven and new earth. We still live in the desert. We still pass through the deep and threatening waters of this chaotic life. With all creation, we groan (Romans 8:18–30) for what Luther referred to as “the dear Last Day.”

In the meantime, we press forward in faith, trusting in the sure promises of Christ Jesus who has called us by his Gospel to be his own. None who look to him will be disappointed.

In Jesus name. Amen