

Sermon - "God Is Doing A New Thing" - 5th Sunday of Lent
Text: Isaiah 43:16-21

Spring had sprung. With the mild winter the flowers are blooming early this year. But no matter the timing spring comes and brings signs of life when we aren't sure if life survived the winter.

Today is a spring type theme for this 5th Sunday of Lent. The heart before us is lit up. It is still a heart but something new has happened to it. The lit heart reminds us of the transformation that takes place in our hearts when we live out our faith journey with God through Jesus Christ. This journey entails releasing our fears to God trusting that God will see us through our trials and darkness. Practicing repentance when we have sinned. This entails not just saying I'm sorry but turning to God, admitting our faults, and then changing our way of living. The third leg of our journey was asking ourselves if we have a forgiving heart. A heart that is open to God's celebrative grace for others and us when there has been sin.

Today the lesson is how God does new things in the midst of the past or the old. I will be using the Isaiah passage to lead us in this discovery. First let us understand the circumstance that Isaiah is addressing in this passage. The Israelites find themselves living 40 – 60 years in exile in Babylonia. They were forced out of their homeland, away from their religious center, the temple in Jerusalem, and sent to a far off land to live as foreigners. They believed that they were lost forever. They had broken the covenant with God one too many times. God had had it and abandoned them. But there now seems to be signs of something new happening. Persia (Assyria) had defeated the great power kingdom of Babylon and there was hope that the Israelites might be set free. Isaiah bolsters this hope through remembering the foundational act of God, leading the Hebrew slaves through the Red Sea, (the parting waters). Basically what Isaiah is prophesying is that God will come and lead the people back to their homeland, not through passing through waters, but through passing through the wilderness. God's presence will come bringing life-giving waters back to a people parched with hopelessness. This new thing that God is doing brings

people hope of new life. Their hearts are lit with expectant Good News! Sure enough the King of Persia (Assyria) let the people GO!

In these past few weeks we have explored what can keep us in bondage. Fear, not facing our wrong and truly repenting before our God, holding forgiveness abet from us or from others. What is God's past act that will give us new life, for us Christians? It is the cross. This is the reason the cross has been behind the heart all along. God through Jesus Christ faced the fear of death by rising Jesus Christ from the grave in victorious resurrection. Jesus dying on the cross and raising from the grave defeated also sin. Sin no longer has as hold over our lives, we can turn to God and truly repent, and be freed from the affect of sin. We have hope of new life through the act on the cross. On the cross Jesus forgave us all. In this grace we have the choice to accept this forgiveness and let it seep deep into our hearts to change us and change our relationship with each other and with God.

In remembering the mighty act of God through God's son, our Savior and Redeemer, Jesus Christ we have the possibility of transformed lives and hearts. Through the cross God comes to us through our wildernesses of fear, sin, and revenge to give us real HOPE of new life.

But the prophet warns us that we have to constantly remember and believe in the action of God saving us. For the Hebrews it was the passing through the waters of the Red Sea. For Christians we are to put our hope in the cross. But in the same passage Isaiah warns the people then and today not to remember the "former things". For the Israelites these former things are the events of the exile: not following the Law, the excruciating pain of separation from what was familiar; the pain of feeling abandoned by God. For us today it is past pain and suffering that we focus on and hides the hope of the cross. When focused on the pain of life and never letting it go, we become in bondage to those events and not the saving event of God. As Christians let us remember our baptism. Let us remember God's saving grace that was poured over us. Let the life giving waters of God's grace water our parched lives and give us new life!

So now comes the question for all of us. How has God's grace, God's living waters, God grace and rescue act found on the cross done something new for us as individuals and as a faith community? Let me take off my shoes, for you are now on Holy Ground, to tell you of an experience I had this week that causes my heart to lit up in God's grace and hopefully add light your life as well.

This congregation went through a painful time when the relationship between this congregation and a pastor was broken. For you who are new to this congregation let me get you caught up. The beloved pastor of this congregation for 35 years, Bill Carlton, retired. It was time to trust in God's leading for a new called pastor. After a purposeful three years, a new pastor was called, Rev. Jerry Ableidinger, and with him, his wife Sue and their two children. Unfortunately, the relationship was short lived and the pastor's relationship between Rev. Ableidinger and this congregation was dissolved only after 14 months. This was extremely painful to this faith community, to Jerry and his wife Sue. Well nine years later I was called her to serve this faith community. What makes this story so unique is that Tom and I were friends with Jerry and Sue. Tom was a supervisor to Jerry during a seminary-required internship. Tom even participated Jerry and Sue's wedding. We hung out as young couples when we lived in Graham Washington and when they lived close by in Puyallup. But we moved to Spokane and the Ableidingers moved on as well. We kept in touch through Christmas letters.

It dawned on me after interviewing with the Kent church that this was the church Jerry ministered in. When I received the call to Kent First I called Jerry to inform him of my call. I knew it would be awkward but I wanted to possibly help him and the church move on. I left a phone message but no contact was ever made. I have seen Jerry at presbytery meetings and at other presbytery functions but as much as I tried to make eye contact to sense if he was wanting contact there was none. Then last Tuesday at presbytery meeting I received a note from a woman sitting three seats to my left. It read it. "Hi Carol it is so good to see you. I have been hoping to see you at a presbytery meeting. Sue Ableidinger. We leapt up and hugged each other. It was like hugging a long

lost friend. She stated that she has moved on past the pain she experienced and was hoping to see me. Sue was able to let go of the “former things” and move on to let God do a new thing! Unfortunately Jerry has not moved on yet. He is still very hurt. We talked briefly after the meeting. I felt God is doing a new thing in our hearts as friends. God was working something new from the former thing in the past, and through the past event of Christ’s death and resurrection this relationship has the beginnings of something new. My heart is lit that a contact with a friend from the past has been made in spite of the awkward elephant in the room, me pastor of the church that did not work out for you the congregation, and for Jerry and Sue. Sue is wanting to let go of past hurt and pain. Sue and I are ready to see the dancing grace of God through a establishing a new friendship.

We all have stories of new life that lights up our lives. What is yours? What ways has God through the event on Christ the cross, transformed your heart in a situation, in particular during this Lent? During the Easter season we will be having time during worship to share these stories. If you do not feel comfortable getting up to share, please write them down give them to me and I will share them, with your permission, in worship. We need to hear how Christ is working. Those not in the church need to hear these stories as well. We can even post them on the web for those visiting our web site to read. You never know how your story may lead people to encounter the life changing Christ in their lives.

This journey in Lent is about turning and returning to God through Jesus Christ and how that changes our lives. What New Thing Has God done in your life this Lent? Let us hear about it.