

A NEW THING
[written in oral form]
[Precedes prayer and anointing of oil for healing]

Isaiah 43:16-21
Lent 5, Year B

April 7, 2019
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For those in captivity, God is making a way out.
Through chaos and mighty waves of terror, God is forging a path.
All hostile resistance will be extinguished.
God is about to do a NEW Thing.

Forget about the Exodus from Egypt; this deliverance will be different.
Do Not remember what you've been taught about how God brings salvation and healing. This new way, God's way, will be different.

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I think it is fair to consider that this message from Isaiah is more than a history lesson. I think there is a universal, abiding truth to this.

Throughout the Bible, we are reminded that God desires that we be free; that God will deliver us from what holds us captive.

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Captivity is what restrains us. It is bondage. Captivity blocks our freedom and progression to healing and wholeness.
Captivity is what traps us / consumes and controls us; it could be an addiction. It could be physical and political restraints.
It could be an illness or disease. Anyone with health issues is keenly aware of their loss of freedom and the hours caught in waiting rooms and all the medical tests.
Our captivity could be from malaise or anything that binds and restricts us.

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We do tend to focus on physical ailments, and rightly so.  
Our body is our only vessel for our spirit and our means for interacting with the world around us.  
Yet, there is much more to understand and appreciate about the Spiritual domain. This includes our spiritual movement/ journey and all our relations with others and God.

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When we contemplate renewal and healing, we tend to imagine our restoration to how things used to be / how we were in the past.
We often use the word "healing", when we actually are envisioning restoration.
Today's text reminds us to forget the past.

Moreover, we tend to have the misconception that God will do as we wish / what we desire, as if we control God.

I think, asking God to fulfill our expectation / our task will give God pause. Our vision may be aligned with God, but more than likely, God has a new and different plan for us.

To be sure, that new way may not be the easy way, but it will be God's way --with God. God's way leads to rejoicing.

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One thing we learned from Jesus is that the path to redemption / to freedom is not the easy way. It is the narrow way, and usually requires letting go and fully trusting God. Our release / our journey to healing may not be easy.

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Last weekend, I had the delight in attending an inspiring seminar. One of the presenters, Dr. Raymond Bailey, was nearly 90. Right after he received his PhD, he became a student of Thomas Merton at the Gethsemane monastery. In his presentation about Merton, he pointed out that Merton was against, what he called, "Sunshine Religion." That religion promotes the illusion that living God's way is easy and happy. Thomas Merton said that Sunshine Religion was not conducive to growing spiritual. Quite often, our journey from captivity begins with the "dark night of the soul."

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Nevertheless, even though our journey to healing may be difficult,,, as Isaiah notes, it is with God. God is forging a path / a way out. It is doable with God.

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In addition, it will be new. It will be different, and not just a refreshed or updated old way. So new, that we may not even be able to imagine what is involved or where it will take us.

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Consider "NEW" -- totally new and likely unknown.

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Around 1990, Wendell Berry was still using his 1956 Royal typewriter to type out his manuscripts for all of his books.

Numerous people were pressuring him to get a computer, claiming they were so much better. In response, he listed conditions that merit purchasing something new, something that is a technological innovation. Here are his conditions:

1. The new tool should be cheaper than the one it replaces.
- 2.It should be at least as small in scale as the one it replaces.
3. It should do work that is clearly and demonstrably better than the one it replaces.
4. It should use less energy than the one it replaces.
5. If possible, it should use some form of solar energy [or renewable energy.]
6. It should be repairable by a person of ordinary intelligence, provided that he or she has the necessary tools.
7. It should be purchasable and repairable as near to home as possible.

8. It should come from a small, privately owned shop or store that will take it back for maintenance and repair.

9. It should not replace or disrupt anything good that already exists, and this includes family and community relationships.

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There not much we could buy, if we followed Berry's guidelines.  
Still, there is merit to what he proposed.  
He was arguing that the new should be better in every way.

Yet, sometimes the NEW is so different that it cannot even be compared to the past.

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Wendell Berry now owns and uses a computer.

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God is the Creator. God creates, and what God creates is usually new and surprising.  
Our journey from captivity will likely require a new and different way.

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Last June 23, 12 young soccer players and their coach went on a side trip. Their small adventure in Thailand led them to their captivity.

They were exploring a cave, when heavy rains came and flooded much of it. They were trapped nearly 3,000 meters into the cave, with 1,450 meters of the passageway out totally filled with water. Parts of the passageway was less than half a meter high.

They had very little food, and one flashlight used sparingly.
Fresh water did drip from the rocks around them.
Most of the time, they sat, chilled, in the dark, praying to be rescued.
Yet, they didn't tell anyone they were going to explore the cave.
Still, they hoped. They likely imagined deliverance would require the water to recede. Or maybe giant pumps would drain the water out. They had no idea how their rescue would unfold.

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Once the authorities discerned that they were in the cave, by tracks and their refuse at the opening, all options for freeing them were considered. Pumps were used to kept the water from rising higher, but it was impossible to drain the cave. Boring a tunnel could not be done, either.  
In all, more than 10,000 people were involved in the rescue, including over 100 divers.  
The first task was to locate where they were in the cave.

The wider parts of the cave served as stationing areas and to store oxygen tanks because the journey was that long.

Finally, on July 2, a British diver found them huddled in the darkness.

The coach and the 12 young soccer player's first contact with their deliverance was with a total stranger--a total stranger.

The English diver was New, a big surprise for them. He was a stranger. One boy, could speak just a little bit of English, that's all.

Still, they had no idea what would be involved in getting them out of their captivity. It was all New,... and many more strangers would be involved.

The process to free them was radical, and it included sedating the boys to render them unconscious. So dangerous was the journey out that they could not be allowed to panic. Keep in mind, none of them could swim.

All were rescued. All were delivered from captivity in a new radical way, ..... by strangers.

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God desires that we will be free, free from our captivity.

God desires that we grow spiritually and find our desperately needed wholeness.

Therefore, God will make a way. God will lead us,...and it likely will be in a New and very different way. So new and different, that we can't even imagine it,.....and that will demand faith.

Moreover, keep in mind the soccer team that was saved NOT by family, NOT by the familiar, but rather by strangers.

Strangers delivered them in a new, radical way.

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Who knows, but God's new thing may be strange to us, and our redemption may come from strangers.

So, maybe we should be open to strange ways and to strangers leading us to healing.

Because we do not know the who or how about God's new way.

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In a few moments, you will be invited to come to one of the stations with two ministers at each.

You will be asked if you want only prayer for healing or prayer and anointing with oil for healing.

We do not know what the healing means, so coming forward is simply a statement that you are ready to be healed,... that you are willing to receive God's New way. It is an act of faith.

Coming forward is a step in your journey to healing and wholeness.