

5th Sunday Lent C 10

March 20, 2010

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Thus says the Lord, do not remember the things of the past, or consider the things of old. For I am about to do a new thing, it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I have done a new thing for the people I call my own so they might declare my praise.

We like our routines. Those habits we get into, like the time we wake up, or the time to exercise, the time to eat and so on through our day and our week. I never used to think I was a creature of habit, but I am reminded each day when I am not in my usual routine. My dog, Chloe knows the time I get up and the first thing is letting her outside quickly followed by our morning walk. She knows I usually get home in the evenings around 4:30 which means it is time for her evening walk. So Chloe greets me joyously then becomes my shadow following me around almost trying to herd me towards the front door.

But there are times due to meetings when our walk has to be put off until later in the evening. There are days I get started earlier or later than usual. Which leaves her to respond the only way she can, she returns to her kennel for a while. There is no amount of cajoling or tempting that will budge her until she is ready. I changed the routine, broke the mold, I did a new thing and she did not like it.

We are not much different. While a change is exciting once and a while, such as a vacation or a trip which forces us to go about our routine differently, it is always good to be home. This is especially true when a crisis happens. It does not matter how big or small the crisis is we find ourselves retreating to our habits, the familiar of the past to find a little comfort and peace in our world.

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Isaiah spent 40 chapters trying to guide and instruct the people to break out of their current habits and return to following God. He worked to help them to remember the past so they might change their future ways. Now their world had been changed and they had to fight to find a way to exist in the Babylonian exile. Now they remembered the old stories, now they continued to hold on to the promise that God would bring them home. They looked back to the last exile saying God will send us a new Moses. But God was about to break the old mold and do a new thing.

Isaiah now came to them saying God will rescue you, God will restore His kingdom. But do not look to the old model to determine how God will rescue you this time. If you think God did such marvelous things in the past, just wait and see what he has planned for the future. Do not remember the things of old, for God is about to do a new thing.

For us the new thing came in the form of Jesus, a servant king, our Lord who came to heal and cure, forgive sins and restoring life. Jesus came to be like us and to show us a new way of living, not according to the old rule and laws, but to live as examples of God's love. The people of Jesus' day were looking to the past for a different style of savior, a warrior king in the mold of King David. They wanted someone to lead them victoriously into battle to overthrow the oppressive Romans. Jesus came to do battle but not with the earthly kingdoms, but to win the eternal battle for our salvation.

So it is not unexpected when Jesus comes feeding the hungry, caring for the sick, forgiving sins and raising people from the dead he was going to make people angry at him. Some people were following him around, herding him toward a kingship he did not want. Even some of his closest followers did not totally understand this new way, this new routine Jesus kept offering to them.

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But some did catch on. Many others came around to see the value of this new way of life only after Jesus death and resurrection. Others like Paul it took even greater intervention by Jesus to blind him to the old ways so he might see the light as it were. In our Philipians text Paul lays out directly the changes which took place in his life.

In our day Paul may have written. I was born to the upper class, a member of a prominent household in society. I went to private school and have an Ivy League education. I have powerful friends in the highest levels of business and government. Yet all these gains, all this history and prestige I regard as nothing because of the surpassing value of knowing Jesus Christ.

The language Paul uses is even more descriptive, he regards his past as a pile of manure in order to be known as a follower of Christ. While at the same understanding that his righteousness has come not because of anything he has done or his status in society. It comes to him as a gift from God.

So now Paul writes my heavenly goal is in front of me and I press on to make it my own because Christ Jesus has made me his own. I am forgetting all that lies behind and strain forward to whatever lies ahead, pressing on toward the goal of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

For Paul it meant living a new life, throwing all the old routines and expectations of his youth out on the dung pile and creating a new life in Christ. Forgetting the past and looking toward a new future. It is the new, the unknown which scares us. Most of the time we will not know if we will be successful unless we try, which means we too need to forge a new path, to break out of the mold, try a new thing.

This is not as strange a concept as we would like to think it is. After all just walk into a book store and see how many shelves are taken by the self-help

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section. Or how many diet or weight loss cookbooks there are. People are seeking out celebrities and gurus to help them accomplish many things to improve their lives. We search for leaders or prophets, for those who seem to have a different window into the future, to show us the path to help us do something new and out of our usual routine. Yet when it becomes difficult, we retreat and hold on to the past, we hideaway in our safe places refusing to come out.

In the next two weeks we will spend time looking at the past, remembering all the things Jesus did for us. We will spend time journeying with Jesus and sitting at the foot of the cross. We come to spend time seeking forgiveness for the sins we have committed, we come looking for the healing of our bodies and our souls, we come looking to be fed at his table.

But we are not to stay there. Thus says the Lord, do not remember those things of old, your sins or your successes, your lies or your lineage, your power or your prestige for all are to be left on the dung heap. Because God has done a new thing and in two weeks we will all stand and proclaim Jesus has been raised from the dead. For through faith in Christ, we have received the righteousness from God. Now we are called to do a new thing, straining forward to what lies ahead so that we might join together in praising the God who claims us as his own and has restored us to a new life.

AMEN

T.G.B.T.G.

Pastor Michael