

Rev. Seth D. Bode † 04-03-2022 † Lent 5

“Domine, volumus Jesum videre,” John 12:21.

“Credo, Domine; adjuva incredulitatem meam,” Mark 9:24.

Isaiah 43:16-21

¹⁸*Do not remember the former things. Do not keep thinking about ancient things.*

¹⁹*Watch, I am about to do a new thing.*



We live in an age of newness. New homes. New toys. New TV shows and new movies. A new Batman, new Marvel superheroes. New homes, new recipes, new celebrities, new entertainment. New medicine, new peace deals, new politicians, new genders. Our technology is new all the time. Does anyone remember when the internet was new? Do you remember when touch screens were new? Do you remember when the teenagers sitting near you ... were new babies? New mothers with new pregnancies, introducing new people.

As great as the past things are, they're like nothing compared to the new.

Nothing compares to the new unless, that is, we expect the new to be better every time. Nor do these new things change the human heart. When new hearts meet old law, they turn out to be sinners just like the rest of us. When new technology meets old hands, sinners find out wicked old purposes for it. Along with new homes comes new stress. Along with new entertainment comes new violence and new controversies. Along with the new medicine, new peace agreements, new politicians, and new church affiliations come new diseases, new wars, new corruption, and newly unmasked false teachers. New toys from Christmas gather dust in the corner. Maybe new things are just new versions of old problems, old temptations, common to man.

But like days of old, we always look for the novelty and the hype.

Today God invites us in on a new thing. He has the cure for human hearts and the way to new life that outlasts the old.

SAME OLD GOD, BRAND NEW VICTORIES

1. God's "new thing" is the long-awaited gospel

Here, we have the same old God, who has been around from eternity, promising to do something entirely new. And He has old examples to point to. "Remember when I did that new thing?" Remember when ***the Lord put a way in the sea and a path through mighty waters?*** Clearly this refers to the Red Sea and the Jordan River. God had a history of displaying His power to stack the waters into walls in order to give His people safe passage. This was the Exodus from Egypt.

And it did not come without cost to God's enemies. God had a storied history of crushing His enemies. Remember when God snuffed out ***chariot and horse, army and champion? Together they would lie down, not rise again; they were snuffed like a wick, they were extinguished.*** God's enemies are like a candle; one moment, it is burning. The next moment, it's a charred wick. They're gone.

God's wonders in the Old Testament were astonishing marvels and really wonderful. His victories were miraculously decisive and really victorious.

But God immediately says, "Don't remember that. ***Don't remember the former things. Don't dwell on the ancient wonders.***" The Greek Septuagint looks like, "***Don't syllogize the archaic.***" Don't sit and mull over it and use it as your main conclusions about God. That's how good this next thing would be. That's how special are the new wonders God has in store.

How did this play out in history? When the Hebrews failed the Old Law, they were punished in exile. But then the Lord brought a remnant of His chosen people back from exile. Isaiah was always speaking the comfort of return from exile, yet ... not even in the return from exile did God bring forth springs and bless His people in the wasteland. This must be fulfilled in something else here.

How could the new wonders be better than the old? The new thing will be a ***way in the wild and rivers in the wasteland.*** Our wastelands and wildernesses are of a different nature than the Exodus and the Babylonian captivity; our Church is in the sea and desert of the world, heresy, sin, Satan, etc.

>>> Thus God did His "*new thing*" when He delivered up the gospel. The free propitiation and full atonement for our sins brought about justification for sinners, no strings attached.

As great as the past things are, they're like nothing compared to the new. Here we are in Lent, week 5, and you may by now be deflated and stale. Your attempts to root out and conquer that on incessant sin or that particular malady that will make life easier, haven't succeeded. What new thing could help you now? The gospel of Jesus Christ is 2,000 years old, and it may seem you must be using it wrong, because you're behaving like you're new at this. You fell back into curse words and swearing. You resurrected an old argument with your spouse. You landed in the same troublesome website online, either wasting time or falling into temptation. You resorted to lies again. What's with these old sins?

Do not give up, brothers and sisters. Don't fail to draw battle lines again. God forgives you those sins today, and ... Look! Watch! See, the Lord is about to do a new thing. He is about to help you. He is about to equip you. He is about to give you new weapons. Just as He brought all the world's sins to the cross to banish them forever and ever, so He will not forget you for whom He died.

2. The good news still unexpectedly renews

One question I have is this: If God did a new thing, would we pay attention to it? Would we notice? That's literally the question in verse 19. Better than, "*Don't you know about it?*" would be the translation, "*Will you not know it?*" It's as if God was saying, "Would you know it if you saw it?" Would you recognize God's new thing if it happened before your very eyes?

God's purpose is to serve His people; so, in verses 19-20, He gives them good gifts in the wasteland. He does not offer new substances, like the nectar of the gods, for completely different improved-upon people. He offers simple elements, like water and bread in the wild.

This is similarly true in our wild wasteland of temptation, sin, and death. God offers sacramental gifts—mysteries wrapped in simple elements—water and Word, bread and body, wine and blood, to supply His people in the sinful wild. Would people recognize God's sacramental good news if they saw it? Of course not! It's the sacraments that feeble-minded sinners have confused, because we couldn't take Jesus at His Word. But very plainly God has promised gospel in both baptism and communion. Both offer forgiveness of sins, everlasting life, and salvation. Let the rivers flow! Let the waters bubble up and spring forth! For

He is the water of life, and He overflows in baptismal regeneration and communal renewal for you!

What if this people is weary of sin, realizing even towards the end of Lent they are still in a wasteland dwelling in the wild? What if your sin has persisted and you know you were not remorseful? The Lord draws you to His cross to provide relief for that sin. With His mighty hand on the cross, He can yet conquer that sin in you.

One way God can help you fight sin is by focusing your heart on the task at hand. Hear this last verse, verse 21, "*This people that I formed for myself will declare my praise.*" "*Declare [His] praises.*" That is, to teach and to preach and to praise God by grace alone through faith; and at the same time rejecting everything else about smug self-righteousness and pride. Whenever we declare His praises, we deliver crushing blows to God's enemies. Wherever the gospel is told, the lies of unbelief are proved to be what they are—stale and rotting in disguise of novelty and hype. Good news brings new sheep and old into the fold. Jesus recruits His believers to show the way to heaven. And telling forth of the gospel is the greatest praise of God; in His name, Amen.

Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.