

Campaign Ambassador Sample Sermon – Isaiah 43:14-21

Bob Fisher
Assistant to the Bishop
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God is doing a new thing — Are you excited when you hear this? Or anxious?

We just love things that are “new”

But the uncertainty of what may be ahead can also make us fearful.

The people of Israel would have had similar reactions when the prophet delivered this **surprising message: Forget the past, I’m doing something new. Can’t you see it?**

God had pulled off a miracle to rescue his people from Egypt. The Exodus was a prime **moment for Israel, giving them a shared identity and a purpose. It’s a story they relive** each year in the Passover festival.

Now, though, they are in exile, captives and the hands of the Babylonians. They long for God to throw their **captor’s horse and rider into the sea, and let them go home.**

But then the Lord says — **Don’t pay attention to the “former things”** — the way I rescued you before.

This must have been discouraging. These deported Jews, longing for home,

But there is good **news here, too, as God also forgets Israel’s past times of turning away and rebellion. This forgetting allows God to undertake a “new thing” to bring about Israel’s freedom.**

It’s lovely poetry, isn’t it? Where God had made a dry path through the Red Sea for Israel’s escape, now he promised flowing springs in the midst of the desert of exile. But the promise is clear: God will deliver them.

Prophetic texts like Isaiah are not accurate history books. They tell a figurative story of how God acted in a particular time and place, and challenge us to imagine how God is moving among us, today, and how we can join in.

So how does Isaiah speak to Lutherans in Southeastern PA in 2016?

Christians in the US today are not in exile.

But to be sure we do face challenges. Many congregations are dwindling. Giving is flat for many churches, or down. At least one generation is missing from many churches.

We're surrounded by "Nones" — people with no religious preference or affiliation — avoid the church and watching **"Dones"** — engaged church leaders who are unfulfilled and frustrated — walking out the back door.

We're called not to look back to what God has done in the past, but to be alert to what God is doing now, the new ways God is giving us opportunities to serve our neighbors, connect with people who are hurting or questioning...

Our Synod is changing our culture to encourage congregations to be part of God's new things.

Give Some examples from Ambassador materials, update data, such as:

God on Tap springing up all over.

Innovative church — Welcome Church, RTP, house churches,

30+ churches have participated — so far — in a mission assessment process

Focus on Living Gospel — Show video if possible

Living Gospel is moving to a new home where they can have more hours to serve more people — thanks to a \$10,000 grant from our Forward Together in Faith campaign.

We're undertaking this initiative because this is the culture we need in the church... one of looking for God's surprising new things, rather than constantly considering the former things. (As Jesus teaches in this week's Gospel, we approach our relationship with the Father through gratitude for all that we have been given, and trust that God will work as God sees fit — and we have a role in this work)

Look **around**. **Do you see "new things" God is doing here at Little Zion?** Where do you see God doing the unexpected in your life — among your family, friends, coworkers, and beyond?

God has always done the unexpected to reconcile his people, and the world. He parted the Red Sea. He came among us as a helpless infant, and he was put to death for **upsetting the status quo of "former things."** **Christ built his church on an impetuous soul,** Peter, who denied him, and on Paul, a zealous rabbi who hunted down and killed Christ followers.

God doesn't need precedent, or the way we've always done it. God makes things new. Our job, Isaiah says is to tell the story of God's love and generativity. That is, if we can perceive it.