

Fifth Sunday of Lent – Year C
Fr. Chad S. Green
Holy Family Catholic Church
Kirkland, Washington
07 April 2019

Isaiah 43:16-21
Psalm 126
Philippians 3:8-14
(Joel 2:12-13) John 8:1-11

Doing Something New

One day, back in third grade, our teacher gave us an activity sheet with the challenge of drawing a “new color”. As we got to work on the challenge, we each pulled out our crayons, colored pencils, and markers. No matter what array of coloring tools we had, none of them could make a “new color”. They were all existing colors. Pretty soon, we began to realize the impossibility of the challenge. How do you make a new color, when all you have to work with are existing colors? As I recall, I ended up scribbling a bunch of random colors together. Hardly a “new color” at all. Rather, a multi-color blob of existing colors.

Looking back, I realize now that the purpose of the exercise wasn’t for us to *actually* come up with a “new color”. It was a chance to have some fun, to be creative, and, most importantly, to stretch our minds. To get our minds thinking “outside the Crayola box”, so to speak. To be open to the possibility of reality being different than our current experience or perception.

That “new color” challenge has stayed with me ever since. And it’s actually kind of bothered me ever since. Is it possible to see or even imagine a new color? Will we one day discover a new color? Will there be new colors in Heaven?

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In the First Reading from the Prophet Isaiah, we heard the LORD say to His people, “...see, I am doing something new!”¹ And when we hear our LORD tell us that He’s “doing

something new”, we should be thinking in the same terms of that challenge of drawing a “new color”.

In one sense, it’s impossible for us to fully imagine and fully understand the “something new” that the LORD is doing for us. Can we truly realize or even imagine a reality different than the one we’re currently living in and perceiving?

In another sense, it’s important for us to allow the LORD to stretch our minds and our hearts, so that in some way, we start imagining, realizing, and living the reality of the “something new” the LORD is currently doing for us and in us.

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This “something new” that the LORD was doing for Israel in bringing them out of Exile in Babylon, is explained by recalling the Exodus experience – how the LORD brought them out of captivity in Egypt. When offered the chance for “something new”, the opportunity for freedom from slavery in Egypt, they gladly took that offer. But they soon learned that the experience of the “something new” required a lot of faith. It required a lot of stretching of their minds and hearts.

As they started their walk toward freedom in the Promised Land, they soon faced the reality of the Red Sea in front of them, and all of Pharaoh’s chariots and horsemen behind them.² By the way they understood reality, they were trapped. They were dead and buried.³ Why did they ever think reality could be different than they knew it to be? Why didn’t they just stay in Egypt? They were slaves, but at least they had some basic comforts of life.

And the LORD said to them, “Have faith! See, I’m doing something new!” The “something new” for Israel meant facing the Red Sea, and seeing that what looked like an obstacle, was actually the path to freedom. Still, they must’ve been thinking: Is it possible to

walk through the Red Sea? Is it possible to escape from Pharaoh's powerful army? And the LORD said to them, "It's time for *you* to do something new!" "Keep still and let the LORD fight for you!"⁴ "Now, take a step into the Red Sea and walk through it!"

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And, as they continued their walk toward freedom in the Promised Land, they soon faced the reality of the desert wilderness: no water. By the way they understood reality, they were going to die of thirst.⁵ Why did they ever think reality could be different than they knew it to be? Why didn't they just stay in Egypt? They were slaves, but at least they had water.

And the LORD said to them, "Have faith! See, I'm doing something new!" The "something new" for Israel meant seeing that what looked like a dry rock, was actually a source of flowing water. Israel must've been thinking: Is it possible to get water from a rock? Is it possible to walk through the desert and not die of thirst? The LORD said to them, "Do something new!" "Strike the rock!"⁶ "Drink from the flowing water!"

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It is this challenge of seeing something new in what the LORD is doing that was foundational for the people of Ancient Israel; that was the same challenge brought to the people of Israel by Jesus; and that remains challenging and foundational for us today.

When Israel found themselves in captivity again – this time in Babylon – the LORD spoke through the Prophet Isaiah. "Once again, I'm doing something new, just like I did before. Remember the Red Sea? Remember the water from the rock?"

Jesus came to bring this challenge, not only to the nation of Israel, but to each person. Is it possible for a Lost Son to return home, be forgiven, and invited to his Father's Banquet?⁷ Is it

possible for someone caught in adultery to be spared from death, to be set free from condemnation, and to go forth to sin no more?⁸

Through telling the parable of the Lost Son, through His acts of mercy and kindness, Jesus was saying to the people of Israel: “See, I am doing something new!” “I have come, not to condemn, but to save!”⁹

Jesus came to save you, me, and every single person. But He can’t save us without us. Saint Augustine wrote: “God created us without us: but he [cannot] save us without us.”¹⁰ What does she mean?

My friends, the LORD *is* doing something new with His Mercy, but we have to allow Him to stretch our minds and our hearts to start seeing it. To start receiving it. To start living in that new reality. The Lost Son came back and accepted the Father’s Mercy. The woman caught in adultery stood with Jesus against her condemners and accepted His Mercy.

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Let the LORD also do something new for you this Lent. Even during these last two weeks – the LORD is ready to do something new and powerful for you. But He can’t do it without you. Maybe Lent is starting to feel like it’s almost over – it’s feeling that way for me. That’s when we can be tempted to start to coast or to start to look ahead to beyond Lent. I’m facing the same temptation to coast through the last couple weeks.

But now is an important time to recommit to your Lenten practices of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving that we began on Ash Wednesday a few days ago. It’s not too late to give the LORD a chance to show you something new. To show you a new reality in which you can be set free from the comforts, habits, attachments, or sins that can prevent us from seeing the new things the

LORD is always doing for us. And, most importantly, make time a for a good Confession. Give the LORD the chance to do something new for you with His Infinite Mercy.

¹ Isaiah 43:19

² Exodus 14:9

³ Exodus 14:10-12

⁴ See Exodus 14:14

⁵ Exodus 17:3

⁶ Exodus 17:6

⁷ See Luke 11:15-32 (4th Sunday of Lent – Year C)

⁸ See John 8:1-11 (5th Sunday of Lent – Year C)

⁹ See John 3:17: “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.”

¹⁰ *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)* 1847, quoting from Augustine, *Sermo* 169