

Hope Springs Eternal

✧ ...forget the past (vv.16-18) □

✧ I am making everything new... (vv.19-21) □

In the Name of Jesus, our Living Hope, dear fellow redeemed:

The opening verses of Isaiah 43 are often quoted in songs and hymns. If you have not memorized them yet, they would be well worth storing in your heart for some dark, lonely night when you need to remember God is kind and near. One artist even pictured these verses as the rescue of believers in Jesus from the burning towers on “9-11”: *“Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior....”* He’s kindly leading toward the verses of our text with this: *“Since you are precious and honored in my sight, and because I love you, I will give...people in exchange for your life.”* That would have been hard for God’s people to believe with the land ravaged by the invading Assyrian army, as we’ve been hearing in our Midweek Lenten messages. But then and now God wants to keep **Hope** alive for us and for our children, for *“everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.”* (Isaiah 43:1–4,7) Today God opens this artesian well in our hearts: **Hope Springs Eternal**.

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Every time I hear this expression, **Hope Springs Eternal**, I think of the faculty room in Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin, where Cindy and I lived when I taught at our preparatory school fresh out of Sem. One colleague made no secret how much she wanted to be married. But she was encouraged that Jesus was single. Always cheerful, she did not dwell on the past. In fact, she looked ahead with so much hope that she adopted a couple of girls and formed a family. **Hope Springs Eternal**, she liked to say.

But isn’t this often true even for nonbelievers? They put their hope in their own spirituality, in idols and other religions. So the God of the Bible calls them out. Their eyes fail to see and their ears fail to hear, so, “You blind and deaf,” God says, “step up now! You nations and peoples of the world give me just one little proof for your religion.” *“Which of them foretold this and proclaimed to us the former things? Let them bring in their witnesses to prove they were right, so that others may hear and say, ‘It is true.’”* If any of them could predict the future, they might be worth following. But to believers the LORD says, *“you are my witnesses...and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me. I, even I, am the LORD, and apart from me there is no savior. I have revealed and saved and proclaimed— I, and not some foreign god among you. You are my witnesses,” declares the LORD, “that I am God. Yes, and from ancient days I am he. No one can deliver out of my hand. When I act, who can reverse it?”* (Isaiah 43:9–13 NIV84) So said all the prophets and the apostles about Jesus the Christ.

What’s surprising in our text is how the LORD commands His people to **forget the past** even when it comes to His mighty acts of deliverance. The *“path”* He made *“through the mighty waters”* was for Moses and the Israelites in the Exodus through the Red Sea. That *“path”* had to be at least three miles wide for 2-3 million Israelites to cross overnight 5,000 abreast. The LORD used that dry, open sea bottom to lure Egyptian *“chariots and horses, the army and reinforcements”* to their destruction. When Moses stretched his hand back over the sea, the waters swept Pharaoh and his superpower army away. *“They lay there, never to rise again, extinguished, snuffed out like a wick.”*

For centuries some Israelites wanted to only think backwards. Yet the LORD says, ***“Forget the former things, do not dwell on the past.”*** As the centuries unfolded, the Israelite descendants also forgot to glorify God for His saving grace, past or present. Their carnal recollections of “the good old days” did nothing to honor God for blessings today. The LORD certainly wants us to remember His great works on our behalf, but not to dwell on the past as if it were so much better than the present. ***“Do not say, ‘Why were the old days better than these?’ For it is not wise to ask such questions.”*** (Ecclesiastes 7:10 NIV84) ***“Not wise”*** because our minds shut out the hardships and turmoil back then. For instance, maybe the 1950’s were “Happy Days” to some, but the very real threat of nuclear war had many Americans building bomb shelters in their back yards. For Christians too it has been said: *Guilt looks back, Worry looks around, Faith looks up.* [from email – Author Unknown] Safe to say, *When faith looks up, Hope Springs Eternal* because the God of all creation, our Redeemer also says,

✧ **I am making everything new... (vv.19-21) □**

“See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland.” Maybe that reminds you of something Jesus said in Revelation: ***“I am making everything new!...These words are trustworthy and true.”*** (21:5 NIV84)

God wants to keep refreshing our bodies and souls. For our bodies He has supplied pipe and pump technology to carry water for hundreds of miles from high mountain streams and rivers to the great Southwest. Do you hear anyone thanking God for this year’s *El Nino* snowfall that has ended the drought in the watershed of the Sierra Nevada mountain range? Or is it all just one big complaint about flooding, etc.? It helps to know what God really means, **I am making everything new.**

God’s ***“streams in the wasteland”*** and His ***“way in the desert”*** are picture language for rescuing us from this vale of tears to Himself in heaven. God gives the water of life for thirsty souls to ***“my chosen, the people I formed for myself that they may proclaim my praise.”*** A few weeks ago as the season of Epiphany began, we stood ankle deep with the crowds being baptized by John in the Jordan River. The dove of the Holy Spirit landed on Jesus while the heavenly Father’s voice boomed, ***“This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.”*** The rising river of God’s grace flowed waste deep at Transfiguration when the Father added, ***“Listen to him!”*** Now that we’re approaching Calvary’s cross, Easter’s empty tomb and Jesus’ glorious ascension, this is a river no one can cross. It makes salt marshes fresh and keeps everything living on both banks. (Ezekiel 47) Life with God is ever **new** and refreshing!

But why are we so dead and dull with our thanksgiving? Why must the LORD also complain about us in the verses following our text? ***“You have not wearied yourselves for me,”*** He says. For your family, fun, work and sports, yes, but ***“not...for me.”*** ***“I have not burdened you with grain offerings nor wearied you with demands for incense.”*** That’s another way of saying, “I’ve fulfilled Moses’ law with all its legal requirements of tithes and taxes. But instead of truly thanking God, by giving ourselves first to the Lord and then to each other ***“in keeping with God’s will”*** (2 Corinthians 8:2-5), God tells us: ***“You have burdened me with your sins and wearied with your offenses.”*** God is generous, we stingy.

You might expect a fire and brimstone verdict from God for every pastor and parishioner who would dare to rob God in heart or wallet. Instead in the very next verse our gracious God says, ***“I, even I am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more.”***

Sometimes when I come to church, I feel as if I’m dragging a huge sack of rocks from the “shoulda-woulda-coulda” warehouse of my life. With all the spiritual advantages God gives, I still must confess that sometimes I’m “dumber than a box of rocks” as one of my cousins used to confess. To the North Shore cliff of confession you drag that bag of guilt. Get a good grip and throw it as far across the water as you can. Watch it sink into the depths and disappear forever. And whatever you do, don’t tie a string to anything in that bag. Not because of the depths of your remorse, sorrow or contrition, but ***“for my own sake,”*** says the LORD, ***“I am he who...remembers your sins no more.”*** **Hope** in God! Amen.