

## Haydenville Congregational Church

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January 1, 2012

Isaiah 43:11-13, 15-19

Galatians 4:4-7

### “The Fullness of Time”

*May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts  
be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord Our Strength and Our Redeemer. Amen.*

In ancient times, it was believed that prophets spoke for God...or put another way, God spoke through the prophets. Prophets—like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea and Amos—were, it was believed, filled with the Spirit of God, able to channel God’s messages, and called to deliver God’s very words.

If Isaiah actually channeled, delivered, and recorded God’s very words, God is quite verbose. Isaiah had a lot to say. The Book of Isaiah is one of the longest books in the Bible—God says a lot through Isaiah including diatribes against foreign nations, condemnation of Israel’s waywardness, proclamations about God’s faithfulness, and descriptions of the suffering servant.

The Book of Isaiah is a multi-layered and extremely important book in the Bible. We learn a great deal about God through Isaiah’s prophesies and oracles. And today’s reading from Isaiah is of particular interest to us on this first day of a New Year because God appears to contradict God’s-self on the subject of time. Many of us have ambivalent feelings about the passage of time—and it appears that even God does as well (at least according to Isaiah).

Today’s passage from the Book of Isaiah, Chapter 43, was written during the exile...Jerusalem has been sacked, and the Israelites have been exiled to Babylon. Isaiah delivers a message from God about restoration and salvation. In place of the despair that the Israelites are experiencing in Babylon, God looks ahead and offers hope. In place of the defeat and humiliation of exile, God offers a vision for the future. God is saying: do not fear, Israel is a witness to my sovereignty, and Israel will be redeemed.

The contradiction about time that apparently comes directly from God (according to Isaiah), is found in Isaiah 43:19. Listen again to God’s words:

*Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old.  
I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?*

The contradiction is on the one hand, God tells the people “do not remember” the misfortunes and pain of yesterday (the “things of old”) because I am doing a new thing, it already springs forth. But on the other hand, all the verses before and after this line are an invitation to look back, to reminisce, to remember...remember that the people of Israel did not labor for God but God labored for them; remember that the Israelites were released from captivity by God; remember that the Israelites have lived in sin and rebellion but God has not abandoned them.

That’s the contradiction. God says: look to the future, I am doing a new thing...however this *look to the future, I am doing a new thing* verse is embedded in a long passage that looks back and remembers the mighty works that God has done in the past.

So even God may be ambivalent about the passage of time...even God may want to look with fresh eyes to the future, to the new thing about to begin...and yet even God (according to Isaiah) drags the past, the history of long ago, the stories, wounds, triumphs and victories from yesterday into today.

And of course (how many times I have told you this?) WE are made in the image of God and we do the same thing. We long for a new beginning, we declare: today I wipe the slate clean, we announce we are making a fresh start; but we haul the past into the present; we don’t believe we can make the changes we claim we want to make; we doubt our ability to create what we want in the future and we keep looking over our shoulder to the past; we do not trust that the future can or will be different; and we do not believe that God is doing a new thing, with us, in our lives, in our time.

Today, on this first day of a New Year, I want to restore your faith in your ability to step away from the wounds and fears of the past and embrace a new beginning with God. I want you to look to the future leaving the past in the past. Armed with God’s goodness, love and strength, I want you to move into this New Year with hope, and confidence that you can create the change you long for in your life. God is doing a new thing. Not just in the past. But here, today, now.

*Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old.  
I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?*

What you thought was fixed and stuck has been turned on its head. God makes a way out of no way, God frees our spirits and heals our soul. God releases and liberates.

You want to be closer to God...look to the future, it is possible.  
You want to be more spiritually fulfilled...look to the future, it is possible.  
You want to be less blocked and frozen inside...look to the future, it is possible.

*Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old.  
I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?*

God is doing a new thing. Not just long ago, but God is reaching out to us, in our time, inviting us to step away from the cares, pain, wounds, addictions, sorrow, depression, anger, disappointments and loss that have haunted our past. God is inviting us to step away from those internal blocks, free ourselves inside and make more room for God to fill our souls and move through our lives.

This morning we also heard a reading from Paul's letter to the Church at Galatia. In the reading from the Book of Galatians, Paul announces that we are the adopted children of God. We are heirs to the divine and holy presence in this world, and Jesus is our true brother. Maybe it is time to claim our place in the family of God...to shed the wounds and fears that have constricted our lives, and claim our place in the family of God—forgiven, loved, safe and at peace.

Listen again to today's reading from Galatians...

*<sup>4</sup>But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, <sup>5</sup>in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. <sup>6</sup>And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our\* hearts, crying, 'Abba!\* Father!' <sup>7</sup>So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.*

This New Year is a good time to recognize the divinity within you. A good time to recognize that we are all children of God, adopted by God into God's own family....we are heirs to the Divine and Holy One.

Note the opening words of the passage: "...when the fullness of time had come...."  
My dear sisters and brothers, the fullness of time has come for you.

It is your time, your year, to move away from that which has plagued, haunted, or frightened you. Clear the clutter out of your inner souls so that God, your parent, can fill your gut and spill over into your entire being.

“...when the fullness of time had come...”

Well, the fullness of time has come, for you, now, this day, this year.

This is your moment.

Listen deeply to what else the passage from Galatians tells us:

*...you are no longer a slave but a child of God, and if a child then also an heir, through God.*

You are no longer a slave. And so whatever has enslaved you...bound you, made you less than, made you hide, made you keep a secret, made you ashamed, made you obsessed, made you fearful...whatever has enslaved you can be released.

This is the year of your liberation.

This is the year when you name and claim this reality: I am a child of God.

I am filled with the light of God.

I was born perfect and whole and I am returning to that very state.

This is the fullness of time. God is doing a new thing.

You can and will be released from that which has enslaved you.

God, like a loving and attentive parent, is near.

And God is doing a new thing. A new thing. With and through YOU.

This is your moment to experience God's new thing working with and through YOU.

This is the fullness of time.

This is your year.

Move toward wholeness, move toward light, move toward liberation, move toward God.

You are loved and cherished as a member of the family of God.

You are safe.

Change is possible.

You can do it.

You are holding a stone. Feel its weight and shape and substance.

If you are willing to take the first step, just the first step, toward releasing something in this New Year that needs to be released

If you are willing to take the first step to unclog that which is clogged and stuck in your life

If you are willing to take the first step to leave something here today that no longer serves you...

Please come forward and throw your stone in one of these metal cans.

AND after you have discarded that which need to be released,

Take something from the table that symbolizes for you, a new beginning, a fresh start, God doing a new thing in your own life.

Throw the stone in the metal can, take a symbol of new life.

As I read the Scripture again, and the poem we heard earlier, I invite you to come forward and discard the stone and take the symbol that speaks to you...

And there are stones up here around the front of the Sanctuary...should you want to throw two, three or more stones, you are welcome to do that.

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