

“HERE’S A NEW ONE”
Isaiah 43:15-21 April 6, 2025

Have you ever been to a **Water Park**? They are a kind of amusement park with water theme rides. Because of their popularity, many of the regular amusement parks and even the Columbus Zoo now have a water park section. There are even indoor water parks like **Great Wolf Lodge** or **Kalahari**, which is a smart move given our weather. When we lived in the Pittsburgh area, we took our children and youth groups to Sandcastle Park located next to the Monongahela River.

That Park had one of the first **wave pools**. The wave machine would go off every half hour and run for about 10 minutes. It wasn’t so bad in the shallow end, but if you swam out into the deep end you received a good workout. There were also waterslides, although some are better described as water **drops**, and you had best be wearing a secure swimsuit. Some water parks have lazy rivers to float around, and others even have jacuzzi like pools with adult beverages.

It might surprise you that this section of Isaiah 43 has a **water theme**. In fact, some form of water is mentioned 6 times within these 7 verses. Like a theme park, Isaiah uses water imagery to take us on a ride to God. So this morning I invite us to step into the waters.

I. THE WATERS OF THE PAST

Frozen 2, the 2019 animated Disney movie, promotes the idea of "**water having memory**." The lead characters go on a journey to discover their past through the interaction of magic and water. Of course, this is

all fantasy and there is no acceptable scientific evidence that water retains a memory of substances it has come into contact with.

However, there was a Japanese businessman and author named **Masaru Emoto** who made a small splash by claiming that water exposed to positive words and intentions formed beautiful, symmetrical crystalline structures when the **water was frozen**, while water exposed to negative words and intentions formed disorganized, asymmetrical structures. His theory has largely been debunked by the scientific community.

While water itself may not carry memories, the effects of water certainly stir our memories. You can hardly mention **Hawley's** history without mentioning the devastating 1942 and 1955 floods. The same could be said about the Israelites living in Babylon. They remembered their historical water stories too.

Isaiah proclaimed, **“Thus, says the Lord, who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters, who brings out chariot and horse, army and warrior; they lie down; they cannot rise; they are extinguished, quenched like a wick:”**

This is the story of God leading the Israelites out of slavery with the Egyptian chariot army in hot pursuit. They recall Moses lifting his staff to part the waters of the Red Sea. They remembered the people walking between the waters and arriving safely on the other side. And they remembered the Egyptian army's attempt to pursue them only to have the waters fall upon them and extinguish the threat.

This water story of the **past** was passed down from one generation to the next. It was a cherished sacred story and part of the people's identity grounded in God's redemptive love. Which makes Isaiah's next words sound really strange. He tells the people, "**Do not remember the former things or consider the things of old.**"

What is the coldest water you have ever been in? When I was in Bangladesh, some 25 years ago, we traveled by train to the tea garden area of Moulvibazar. There we stayed at a Christian Mission compound. We met with local pastors to do some ministry training. The temperature was 80 degrees in November. Thank goodness, because there was no hot water in the showers. This was cold-water therapy before it was a health trend. But even that didn't compare to swimming as a child in Lake Superior while on vacation. I don't know what the temperature was, but my siblings and I turned blue pretty quickly.

After Isaiah recalls the Exodus story, he basically tells them to forget it. **This is like jumping into a cold lake.** It would shock the system. Imagine if I said I want you all to forget about Easter and Christmas this year. Elders would be up in arms, the **Worship Committee** would rend their garments, and Choir members would swoon. What do you mean forget about Easter and Christmas? I guess it's time to get a new pastor. What Isaiah said was just as shocking and it was meant to be. It got people's attention. It woke them up and motivated them to listen for what was coming next.

II. WATER IS FLUID

Isaiah proclaims, **“I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth; do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.”**

Isaiah tells the Israelites to forget their past, not because he really wants them to forget what God has done for them, but because God is about to do a new thing, and he wants the people to respond to it. And there is nothing like the past that can get in the way of the new.

Understand the people have lived in Babylon for the last 70 years. For better or worse it has become home for them. Children born there have never set foot in the Holy Land. They have adapted and prospered and gotten used to the familiar. Why would they want to return to the devastated country of Judea?

Doesn't that have a familiar ring to it? Oh we long for the good old days, when no store was open on Sunday, when there were only three channels on the TV set and you had to get up to change it, when you could buy a house for \$20,000, when men wore suits and ties even to the ballpark, when gas was 30 cents a gallon and groceries were \$15 for the week. Just give us some of that old time religion with the hymns that we know. It's comfortable, it's known, it's tradition.

In school we learned that **water is a fluid**. In truth, it is a vital fluid for life. Water serves as a universal solvent, it can absorb a large amount of heat energy without a significant change in temperature, which helps regulate Earth's climate, and most of the functions in our bodies operate because of the water in our system. Not only is water a fluid, but it is also

fluid. It has the ability to flow and move and assume different shapes. It has substance, but it is difficult to hold in your hand. Water is fluid, and believe it or not, so is God. And God is on the move and calls us to wake up to the present. Don't let the nostalgia longing of the past threaten to dull you to the opportunities in the present reality.

Isaiah pictures the people as standing on the threshold of a new frontier. The Persian Army is coming to overthrow Babylon and set the Israelites free, but they are reluctant to return to an uncertain future that involves trekking through a desert and rebuilding a new life.

Lent is a great time to ask, what in our **past** is keeping us from seeing the future? Are we too comfortable to take any risks, to step out in faith to the opportunities of right now. Do we keep looking backward to what was or are we looking forward to what yet may come to be? It is difficult for people criticize the Church for not being relevant if the Church open to new possibilities of the Spirit. Learning from the past is a good thing, but God is not re-enacting the past. God is calling his people to embrace the present challenges and step out in faith, to do a new thing. Do you not perceive what God is doing Church?

III. WATER SPRINGS UP IN ODD PLACES

Have you ever experienced a **leaky roof**? The problem with a leaky roof is its not always easy to discover where the leak is coming from. Water travels in odd ways and may surprise you where it springs up. Sometimes you have to wait for a good rain, go up in the attic with a flashlight, and look carefully for the source of the leak.

Isaiah speaks, **“The wild animals will honor me, the jackals and the ostriches, for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people.”**

Like leaky water, God often pops up in surprising ways, in the wilderness, in the middle of a desert, in the form of a homeless man, in the eyes of a parent who has lost a child, in the kindness of a hospice chaplain, in the voice of a stranger who gives us directions. You never know where you might drink in God’s Grace. Do you not perceive it Church?

IV. WATER REMINDS US WHOSE WE ARE

The last point I want to make about **water is that we use it mark** who and whose we are. Isaiah’s prophecy is framed by the first and last verses. **“I am the Lord, your Holy One, the Creator of Israel, your King...the people whom I formed for myself so that they might declare my praise.”**

God begins by identifying God’s self. I am – life itself. The Lord of Life, The one set apart from all others. The one who created Israel, created the church, made a people called his very own – in other words, neither Israel nor the Church can exist apart from God. We were made to live our lives honoring and praising the Lord. Our identity and purpose is wrapped up in the Lord and sealed in the waters of this fount. It marks who we are, a people redeemed by God’s saving love and grace.

There’s a true story that happened in a German POW camp during World War II. Somehow, unbeknownst to the guards, the American

prisoners had managed to scrape together enough electronic components to build a makeshift radio. They kept it tuned to the BBC. One day, news came over the radio that the German high command had surrendered. The war was over, although the word had not yet filtered back to the camp's guards.

Suddenly, a change came over the prisoners: one that, to the guards, seemed incomprehensible. They sang, they waved at the guards and smiled, they laughed at the German shepherd dogs, they shared jokes over meals of watery soup and stale bread. On the fourth day after the news broadcast, the prisoners awoke to discover that their captors had fled, leaving the gates of the camp wide open. At long last, their captivity had come to an end.

Their life had been different during the past few days than it had been in all the preceding years. The difference, of course, was the news they heard of something sure to happen in the future. That future promise made all the difference.

We too have a future promise. It's the promise of our faith, the promise that God isn't finished with us yet, the promise that one day all that is now indistinct will be made clear. Because we have heard that promise, and know it to be true, we can get up from the place where we are — the place where we so frequently feel stuck and immobilized — and move on. In the eyes of faith, it's always a new day! Rejoice, sing a new song, and don't be afraid to venture into new waters. **Amen.**

First Presbyterian Church in Hawley
Sunday, April 6, 2025
Second Scripture Lesson

Isaiah 43:15-21

¹⁵ I am the LORD, your Holy One, the Creator of Israel, your King.

¹⁶ Thus says the LORD, who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters,

¹⁷ who brings out chariot and horse, army and warrior; they lie down, they cannot rise, they are extinguished, quenched like a wick:

¹⁸ Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old.

¹⁹ I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.

²⁰ The wild animals will honor me, the jackals and the ostriches; for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people,

²¹ the people whom I formed for myself so that they might declare my praise.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be To God.