

12/27/2020

Opening Prayer

Good morning, and welcome to the final sermon for 2020! Many of you know Judy Patterson, our resident eye doctor out at PCUMC. She made mention at the beginning of this year that 2020 was jokingly referred to as the perfect year in eye doctor circles because 20/20 vision is perfect. Well, with hindsight being 20/20 as well, I think all of us are in agreement that this year has been less than stellar. Most of us are eager to see it go. Lord knows there have been some wonderful joys interspersed (for us the birth of our daughter comes to mind obviously), but for the most part we are in need of hope renewed. Battered and bruised and tired we are in need of something new. Well Beloved, we will finally begin a new year in five short days, and God willing it will be a much less contentious year than the one we leave behind. We pray for renewal, and renewal is the message this morning. Rest assured, God is making something new and renewed in this world and in us.

Renewal and redemption go hand in hand in scripture often. The idea of being restored, brought back, healed, etc. all come together in these words. The man whose birth we just celebrated, Jesus, is the hallmark of renewal and redemption. Our reading for this morning from Isaiah 43 connects to Him and His work upon the cross. It is through Jesus that our renewal comes, and it is in readings like the scripture we read that we can see this is has always been God's ultimate plan.

Isaiah 43 begins "But now, thus says the Lord, your Creator, O Jacob, and He who formed you, O Israel, 'Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are Mine!'" While the words written in Isaiah would have originally been for the nation of Israel, there is no question that they apply to us as well. 43:7 makes that clear by stating "Everyone who is called by My name, and whom I have created for My glory, whom I have formed, even whom I have made." That applies to us who call upon Jesus, even if we are not Jewish. These words of hope are for us too. As He declares, we are His. You do not belong to the world. You are under another's rule. You are His. He continues "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, nor will the flame burn you."

His protection, Beloved, and His care are ours because we are His. You may argue against these words (and I don't necessarily blame you) when trials come. When a loved one passes, when you lose your job, when an unspeakable horror is committed upon you and those you care for, we question these words. We often feel burned, and like we are drowning, and like we are alone. Yet here in Isaiah 43 we are told that we are never left alone, that we are never burned or drowned, that the harms of this world will not overcome us. How can this be, when evil abounds so? In the past we can find the key my friends. A wise pastor once said, "Is there anything in your life that God has not allowed you to overcome?" It is a wise statement! All of us have been through much in our lives, much that we thought would overcome us. We can all think of those hard days from the past. You who have experienced war, those of you who have lost a spouse, those of you who have changed professions, those of you who have had cancer, those of

you who had a hard childhood... we could go on forever. The Lord saw you through all of that, and in many cases while you would wish it upon no one else you also appreciate what those difficult times made you into. In those days the Lord kept His promise, both in this life and into eternity. It is hard to see in the midst of it, but hindsight is 20/20 and if we listen and look for what God is doing we can see that He has had a plan all along. If there is something that still aches it means that either we have not gotten through it just yet or that we will get there in eternity.

Isaiah 43:8-9 reads “Bring out the people who are blind, even though they have eyes, and the deaf, even though they have ears. All the nations gathered together so that the peoples may be assembled. Who among them can declare this and proclaim to us former things? Let them present their witnesses that they may be justified, or let them hear and say, ‘It is true.’ ‘You are My witnesses,’ declares the Lord, ‘And My servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe Me and understand that I am He. Before Me there was no God formed, and there will be none after Me. I, even I, am the Lord, and there is no savior besides Me. It is I who have declared and saved and proclaimed, and there was no strange god among you; So you are My witnesses,’ declares the Lord, ‘And I am God. Even from eternity I am He, and there is none who can deliver out of My hand; I act and who can reverse it?’” When the Israelites were given this news in Isaiah 43, they had been through much. They had seen their nation destroyed, they had been taken away in chains, and they were in need of hope. If you were here during our walkthrough of the Exile earlier this year, it is the same time period. Yet God promises them, in the midst of great suffering, that something new is coming. That He is going to save them, by His own hand. No one else, no other false god, not by their own hand or cunning, but by His hand they would be saved. Beloved, He held that promise and brought the people out of great suffering just as He said He would. Will He not do the same for you in the midst of those things that plague you? He has already delivered you from much in your lives hasn't He? He has seen you through many difficult and hard days. He has watched over you in a million ways you can't understand. He has sent His Son to die for you upon the cross, cementing your eternity. Beloved He is worthy of your trust in hard times, He is worthy of your hope. He is worthy, and He makes good on His promises to do make things new.

“Do not call to mind the former things, or ponder things of the past. Behold I will do something new, now it will spring forth; will you not be aware of it?” I love this word of the Lord, He knows us so well! We love to dwell on the things of the past don't we? We tend to remember the hurts of our past so well. We are still haunted by that stuff we said back in junior high. We still feel the pain of that insult against us that was spoken twenty years ago. We still feel deeply those hurts and aches and pains that in theory should have long faded. But that stuff is the past. It is behind us, and while there are hurts that always sting some (the loss of a loved one for example) we are remiss if we don't see what the Lord is doing now. Will we not be aware of it? Will we not take notice of the things that the Lord is doing in our midst that are of great joy? Will we not take notice of the hope and joy and peace He extends to us? We often like to dwell on the past, but the future for us as Christians is bright Beloved.

I want you to think now not about the crap that you have experienced this last year, or the crap that you experienced in the past that haunts you, or the hurts that you have endured. Instead I want you to think hard about how the Lord is blessing you now. Whether you are eight or ninety-eight that is true Beloved. If you want an example to work off of, for my wife and I we could focus on how close Rhianna came to perishing this last year. There is a temptation to focus on how much energy and strength and security was lost in those months where she was septic and came close to death. But if we focused on that we would be missing the joy in what the Lord has been doing in our marriage. Even if we take the easy joy of our daughter out of the equation, there has been an increased closeness in our marriage. We weren't far apart before, but we are most certainly closer now! For you it is probably something different that the Lord has been giving you. Maybe you have been in the middle of a great family tragedy in 2020. The temptation is to focus on that, those great pains, instead of looking to how the Lord is renewing you. Maybe you have come closer to you kids and grandkids in this difficult season, or maybe you are anxiously looking forward to seeing your family more than ever before. When that opportunity comes it will be a great joy won't it? Perhaps you have suffered with an injury or difficult diagnosis this year. Isn't there joy in a body healed and renewed? Even if you aren't there yet you can look forward in earnest to it. Even if there is something that you realistically look at and say "This is never getting better," or "I will never be healed," or "This will never be fixed" Beloved I am here to tell you that your Savior is not done. You see the best part of this promise for redemption, for renewal, is that He doesn't just promise us hope in this life but for eternity.

There is hope on the horizon for those of you who are in great distress. There is peace for those of you whom are restless. There is a promised redemption and renewal coming by His hands. His previous actions prove that we can rely upon Him. Jesus's birth, life, death, and resurrection are the hallmarks of a Lord who promises to make all things right in His time in the best way. The question is not will redemption and renewal come, but will we notice it? Will you take notice of what God is doing, how He will turn what the world and Satan and sin tried to make into our down fall into a strengthening for you? Will you take notice of the renewal that He has already enacted in your own life, or will you continue to dwell on the past? (You are not the same as you were twenty years ago!) Will you continue to live without hope and without peace regarding the future, or will you take notice that He has secured your eternity? Yes, Beloved, we can have hope. Yes, Beloved, we can have peace. Yes, Beloved, redemption and renewal are ours by His hand because He has told us "You are Mine!"

In five days we begin the new year. It is unlikely that everything in our lives will be made right the moment the clock strikes midnight, but what are the odds that all that aches us will continue through to the end of 2021? Be renewed as we enter a new year Beloved, looking and watching for the new thing that the Lord will do. You may be surprised at what He will see you through, and you may be surprised at where you are at 365 days from now. Thank the Lord our hope is found in Him! Let us pray,

Closing Prayer