

Opening Message presented through Sara Beth Terrell

“Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. Here and now I am doing a new thing. This moment it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.” Isa 43:18-19

Here and now God is doing a new thing. Can't you see it?

In this passage Isaiah is continuing the message begun in chapter 40 to exiles returning home from Babylon. They're heading back home to a place that, in their mind's eye, hasn't changed in decades. Some of them have never seen this home and only know it from stories, stories that must have grown large in their imaginings. And midst the promise of abundant provision and care God says, “Don't think about what was. Don't let your minds get stuck on what *you* think home is or looks like. Here and now I'm doing a new thing. This moment it's springing forth. Can you see it? Can you feel it? Will you step into it with me?”

While we weren't forcibly removed from our houses and taken hundreds of miles away to a life of servitude, we *were* forced to leave a spiritual home. It was an entity we chafed at, but it was familiar; it was what we knew. And in the very understandable human anxiety of any form of homelessness, the temptation is to build a home in the image of what we remember; the temptation is to do what we have always done, the way we have always done it; the temptation is to do whatever we can as fast as we can to decrease the anxiety we feel. And God says, “Forget all of that. That's the old way. Those are former things. Here and now I'm doing a new thing and you can walk into it with me here and now.” We are being invited to make our home not in the construct of our own hands, but in God. In the God who makes paths through trackless wilderness and who pours out streams in the desert.

Here and now God is doing a new thing. Can you perceive it? Can you sense it? Can you see it? Because our perception is key here. The truth is a paradox. The truth is that we are *always* at home in God; we have *never* left our home in the one who created us. *And* most of us believe we are totally separate from God, separate from one another and from all of creation. We were kicked out of the garden; woe is us; we have to make do the best we can to take care of ourselves because God's out there somewhere. And we're all alone now to fend for ourselves. It's what we believe deep down, isn't it? Some people claim the Bible says it end of story. But early Friends said, “No. That's a lie! God isn't out there; God is here in us. In every one of us.” We *can* go back through the flaming sword guarding the way back into the garden into union with God. The separation is all in our perception. And in what we were taught from the world we live in, the world ruled by the powers-that-be.

We are taught—and it's reinforced all over the place—that fear and scarcity and domination are just what is; they're just the way the world works, so suck it up and deal. We're on our own; when push comes to shove you better count on yourself because there isn't going to be anybody else there. We can complain and wring our hands about all the fearful things in the world—and if you haven't taken note of many this past week, you've got pretty good blinders on—but we're powerless, in this

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world of domination, to do anything about any of them. This is the world, and that's just the way it works.

Now, if you're lucky enough to have a place higher in that domination hierarchy, you may not be quite as upset about things. Most of us don't have a clue how deeply we participate in the domination system and support the powers-that-be with our life energies because it's the water we swim in. And claiming Quaker testimonies doesn't give us an exemption from any of it. But it is in the nature of being human to encounter exile of one kind and another from time to time giving us the opportunity, should we choose away from the work of our own hands, to wake up and come home to God. We can choose it.

God is doing a new thing. Can we see it? Will we look? Will we say yes or no?

God is a God of abundance, not scarcity. God is Love and Perfect Love casts out all fear. When we step into the Kingdom of God—which Jesus says is right here, right now—when we step into the New Creation, we step out of domination and hierarchy and into the economy of gift, where gift and resources flow toward need, not toward the top. In the Body of Christ we are *all* the right size and the right shape for what is ours to be and do in the world; and that right size and shape are fluid, depending on the needs of the moment in the community around us. In the body of Christ, authority follows gift, not position. We are never on our own to do the best we can with what little we have. When we make our homes in God, we have everything we need. It may not look like what we want, but we're talking about a God who makes rivers run through the desert, a God who knows our needs better than we ourselves do.

Here and now God is doing a new thing. This moment it springs forth. Can we see it? Can we step into it? What might happen in the world if we stepped into it together?

We have a God who clothes the lilies of the field. So many times in these chapters surrounding our text for today God says, "Fear not, do not be afraid, for I am with you." We have a God who is even now pouring out streams in the desert before us and making a path for us through waste places. And we're sorely tempted to say, "Oh, don't bother. We have a compass. We have a water bottle. We'll be fine. We can get ourselves there." See the temptation and say no to it.

Here and now God is doing a new thing. In every moment we can turn away from the work of our own hands, we can turn away from the way we have always done it in the world that is way too familiar; in every moment we can turn again to this God who promises to care for us. What would happen if we said yes? What might happen if we turned and made our home in the Living Christ who is here now among and within us? What would happen if we even said, "God, I can't see it, but I want to! Put my feet on your path! Let me make my home in you! Guide my steps and take away my fear!"?

We have to learn to see the hallmarks of stepping into God's presence. We have to start telling our God stories to one another so that we can learn to see this new thing God is doing and has always

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been doing. Many of us step in and out of God's presence every day without realizing it. When we are patient and kind and gentle, we've stepped into God's kingdom if only for a moment. When we use our gifts for the good of all and not for our own purposes, we step even momentarily out of the world. When we refuse to feed fear or resentment or anger or hurt or despair, we step into the realm where Love rules.

Making our homes in God is not a once and for all decision. It's a choice we're faced with all day, every day as we live and move in God, as we walk in the Living Christ. Some days the best we can do isn't much, but that's OK because God's love surrounds and upholds us regardless. We can't earn this Love. We have to allow it. We have to be vulnerable to it. We have to learn to say yes to it shaping and forming us into the people of God, into the Body of Christ, into the redeemed community where anything is possible.

God is here and now doing a new thing. This moment it springs forth. Can we see it? Will we say yes to it?