

God's People of Today
Isaiah 43:16-21
Pastor Art Scanson

A major university experienced an amazing turnaround in its football program a few years ago. The next spring, at the opening of spring training, the coach gathered his players together for a team meeting. As the players found their seats, the coach announced he was going to hand out awards that many of the players had earned in the fall. As the coach called players forward and handed them their awards, they were cheered on by their teammates.

Then one of the assistant coaches gave the head coach a placard representing the national coach-of-the-year award he had won for the team's play. He accepted it proudly. Then, as the applause subsided, the coach walked to a trash can which was marked with the year of their outstanding season, took an admiring glance at his placard, then dumped it into the trash can.

In the silence that followed, one by one, the team's stars dumped their awards on top of the coach's. The message was clear: "What you did last year was terrific. But look at the calendar: It's not last year anymore."

That is good advice. The team had experienced a great year, but they needed to focus on the year ahead.

That is where we are today. We mark fifty years of worship in this sanctuary and this building. We gather to look back at where and what God has done through McCabe's people and ministries. It is good for us to celebrate. And as we see and remember of God's goodness of the past - we must hear God's call for us to look and walk into the future.

Our scripture for today is from Isaiah. Israel has experienced many BAD years. Many of their best people are in exile in Babylon. It is anything but a happy time. Along comes the prophet Isaiah. He brings them a message of hope, it goes something like this: This has been a difficult time, but look at the calendar. It's not the past anymore. God is alive and at work in human history. Then speaking in the voice of God Isaiah says, "Forget what happened long ago! Don't think about the past. I am creating something new." In other words, don't look back at your disappointments, there is a new day ahead.

For us today is a day to look back to see where God has been praised by the ministry of McCabe's people. Where God's mighty acts have been revealed with and through God's people as they praised God.

Let's listen to the scripture lesson - read Isaiah 43:16-21.

In order to encourage them even more, Isaiah takes them for a look at the

time in their history of the Exodus, when God led them out of slavery in Egypt. The time when God parted the waters of the sea for them to pass through and how the waters closed again over the Egyptian chariots. A miraculous deliverance from the hand of the Pharaoh. Then comes the assurance that God will do it again.

My friends, hear this! It is God's message for us just as it was for Israel! Isaiah has those same words for us when he writes: "I am creating something new. There it is! Do you see it? I have put roads in deserts, streams in thirsty lands. . .for my chosen people. I made them my own nation, so they would praise me."

What striking imagery! Why will God do all this? One reason: God has chosen Israel. Israel is "the people who I formed for myself so that they might declare my praise." That they might declare my praise!

How about you? Have you ever considered yourself chosen by God? Have we as a church ever intentionally thought about or talked about being chosen by God?

Most of us came from Christian families. But one thing we dare not do, is to boast about our faith as if it was something we accomplished all on our own. It was not. There was an intermingling of the influence of others as well as our own will that was responsible. We were chosen. Now, chosen for what? Listen! God chose Israel for a purpose – to declare God's praise. The same is true for us as persons and as a church.

We are a very fortunate people. If we interpret our good fortune to mean that God somehow prefers us to others, it would be a disastrous mistake. If God has chosen us, it is for a reason. It is because God wants us to declare God's praise before our friends and neighbors and coworkers. Yes, this is our inheritance from those who have gone before us at McCabe. Those who have nurtured us, spent time with us, loved us, and shown us God's love.

So now, how do we declare God's praise? We do it by living a life of genuine Christian love. How is that? We have just spent the time of Lent studying the "Three Simple Rules" - To do no harm, to do good, and to stay in love with God. If we are willing to live by these three rules we will touch the lives of others and together we will be compelled to declare God's love.

Max Lucado tells of a woman in a small Arkansas community who was a single mom with a frail baby. This hard-working Mom had a neighbor who would stop by every few days and keep the child so she could shop. After some weeks this neighbor shared more than her time with this hard-working Mom; she shared her faith in Jesus Christ. This young mother was deeply affected by her neighbor's actions and words and gave her heart to Jesus.

The friends of the young woman objected. “Do you know what those people teach? They contested.

“Here is what I know,” she told them. “They held my baby.”

That’s what she knew and that’s what mattered to her. She had experienced the love of Jesus from her neighbor. That is what it means to declare God’s praise before the peoples.

What good will each of us do as we commit ourselves to praise God in the future? Will McCabe be remembered in the future because of the good you and I will do in the days and years to come? Will God be praise because we remember God’s mighty deeds in our life? As God’s people in this time, our purpose, is to declare God’s praise.

There is one thing more that needs to be said. Once God’s hand has been laid on us, God will bless. This is the other side of being chosen by God. It is very difficult to get God to give up on you.

Jesus taught us that God is like that and we ought never forget it. My friends, you and I are chosen people - God’s people for this time. We have been chosen to declare God’s praise by showing forth the love of Jesus.

The greatest thing we can do as we celebrate God’s blessing and goodness for these past 50 years is to accept once again the purpose of our being called by God. That is to declare God’s praise so that those present now and those to come will know of this Jesus through the love of a people know as McCabe United Methodist Church. Thanks be to God! And all God’s people said, “Amen!”