

Do You See It?

Indiana-Kentucky Synod, ELCA + September 2010

Read Isaiah 43:8-21.

Consider the **context**. Israel is in exile, having been captured and carted off to Babylon. Against their will the familiar, comfortable landscape has been left behind.

Read Psalm 137.

Imagine and discuss the emotions behind this psalm of exile.

Consider these snippets from Walter Brueggemann's *Theology of the Old Testament*, in reference to Isaiah 43:

Most remarkably, the exile becomes for Israel an arena in which Yahweh utters new promises. Neither Israel nor the God of Israel would concede anything to the exile. In the face of that most discouraging circumstance, Yahweh issues the most far-reaching promises. In addition to a variety of utterances guaranteeing restoration, rehabilitation, and homecoming for Israel, we should especially note that in the midst of exile, Yahweh utters a very different kind of promise, bespeaking an intimate connection to and solidarity with Israel that is to be expressed as presence.

The very presence of Yahweh with Israel in exile holds the potential to transform exile into a viable place for life. It is clear that the promises characteristically articulate Yahweh's intention to work a radical newness in Israel's life, which can in no way be derived from present circumstance. Moreover, the specific anticipations in these promises derive much of their substance from Israel's old core memory, so that Yahweh will do again what Yahweh had done in time past: new creation, new covenant, new kingship, new exodus, new land distribution. The substance of the promises is derived from old memories, but the power to generate the newly promised reality is rooted not in what is old, but in what is fresh and alive about Yahweh.

Discuss the connections between God's promises to those in exile and the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Discuss these questions:

- What are the signs of exile or dislocation in and around your congregation?
- What are the signs of a "new thing" that God is doing?
- What are your hopes and fears about God's new thing?
- How might you and your congregation welcome, nurture, encourage, and be transformed by God's new thing? What might need to change in order to do this?

Read Ephesians 3:14-21.

Pray for each other, for your congregation and for your sisters and brothers throughout Indiana and Kentucky, remembering the One who "by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine."

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Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval. By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.
[Hebrews 10:23-25; 11:1-3]

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