

Yes, Something Better is Possible 2022  
Isaiah 43:18-21 Luke 5:30-38

### Isaiah 43:18-21 (New Revised Standard Version)

Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. 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. 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, the people whom I formed for myself so that they might declare my praise.

### Luke 5:30-38 (New Revised Standard Version)

The Pharisees and their scribes were complaining to his disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" Jesus answered, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance." Then they said to him, "John's disciples, like the disciples of the Pharisees, frequently fast and pray, but your disciples eat and drink. Jesus said to them, "You cannot make wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them, can you? The days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days." He also told them a parable: "No one tears a piece from a new garment and sews it on an old garment; otherwise the new will be torn, and the piece from the new will not match the old. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the new wine will burst the skins and will be spilled, and the skins will be destroyed. But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins.

Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. 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 43:18-19)

### **These are wonderful words of hope and promise on several levels.**

Originally

they were written to the exiled Israelites living in Babylon.

These were the descendants

of the Hebrew nation taken into captivity some 70 years earlier,  
and who over time had tried to make the best of their situation.

Many had become quite successful, wealthy and comfortable.

They were no longer even thinking about returning home to Israel,  
but quite content and willing to continue their life in Babylon.

When the Persian army defeated the Babylonians, King Cyrus  
had liberated the Hebrews to return & rebuild their homeland.

This passage was written to encourage and urge

the Hebrew people to make the journey back home to rebuild Israel,  
because God was promising them something more and far better  
than for them to remain complacent, comfortable and stagnant.

Babylon isn't your real home and it's not your final destination,  
so make the effort and risk a journey through the wilderness

to return and to rebuild your life and home back in Israel.

The Lord loves you, and has way more blessings and grace for you,  
and in fact, God will even transform the wilderness for you,  
which will enable you to make the journey that God intends.

God intended so much more for them and **to bless them beyond Babylon.**  
The Good News proclaimed in this Isaiah passage  
is that God wasn't done with them and God hadn't given up on them,  
but they were to go home, and the nation of Israel be restored.

The lesson I take from this Isaiah passage is a challenge  
to recognize my own compromise & accommodation to **MY Babylonians,**  
and trust the truth, power and promise,  
that the Lord does have more and better for me,  
**the abundant life and purpose for which God has prepared for me.**

To live faithfully with God is always a continuing adventure,  
and our current understandings, relationship & experiences  
are only **the prelude** to whatever God is about to do next...  
... for wherever any of us are along our life's spiritual journey,  
God is not done and is not finished with us yet,  
and we know that, because our hearts are still beating.

Therefore, our call, continues to be to a new and wide awakening,  
and a spiritual reawakening to a fresh awareness of possibilities,  
of the presence, purpose and promise of God and God's grace,  
for the very best is still yet to come.

Isaiah's message was, don't get too comfortable or complacent  
because God is up to something wonderful, unexpected and new.  
Also, don't dwell on the past or look longingly back to the past  
or let our past define who we are or who we are becoming,  
but look ahead toward the future God intends for us.  
The word of God: **I'm doing a new thing; don't you want to be in on it?**

I am reminded of younger days back when I lived in Virginia,  
and that one of my favorite places to go hiking and camping  
was "Old Rag", a mountain out past Front Royal, VA.

It was a very gentle and easy hike through the woods at first,  
then the trail would get a lot steeper and far more difficult.  
Further on it got to be considerably more challenging  
a tougher climb scrambling up over rocky formations.

When the trail got over the tree-line to the "staircase formations",  
you could see across into the valley, and at that point,  
many of the hikers would then stop and give it up there,  
to avoid the more arduous climb all the way to summit.

I would keep going because only from the mountaintop could you see  
the panoramic view overlooking the beauty of the Shenandoah Valley.  
The amazing view from the summit made that hard climb worthwhile,  
well worth all the extra effort that's necessary to reach the top.

Authentic and growing Christian discipleship is like that.  
It's a life-long journey of faith-going-deeper with Christ,  
in which God calls us to far more than just the comfort and ease  
of stopping before the summit and going no further in our faith.

And wherever we are in our faith journey today and right now,  
God is calling us to something more, something better & wonderful...  
... and Isaiah's message is to make the effort & to go for it.

However, and this is very important,  
it's not about earning something or being better than someone else.  
The whole point here, is to become  
the best of who and what God designed and created us to be...  
... all of it as our faithful response to God's prior gracious love.

In the Luke passage we read,  
the Pharisees and their scribes do not understand that,  
and they object to Jesus reaching out to lost sinners, vs. 30.

*The Pharisees and their scribes were complaining to his disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?"*

The religious perspective and self-understanding of the Pharisees  
was that only the people sufficiently pure and holy  
were acceptable and good enough to approach the Lord God.

But in the life-example and teaching of Jesus,  
where we see the Lord God more fully and more clearly revealed,  
clearly God's grace and mercy extend far beyond  
the Pharisees' understanding of the Old Testament.

The Pharisees followed prescribed and rigid religious practices,  
intentionally inflexible as they strived for self-righteousness  
because they were sure that they alone had it right,  
and that they knew exactly what God wanted from them.

In contrast to the Pharisees' self-righteous certainty,  
Jesus explains his ministry toward sinners, vs. 31-32  
*Jesus answered, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance."*

In the Upper Room Jesus spoke of the new covenant in his blood,  
meaning that the Lord God wasn't done and has something new,  
and there's a lot more grace and welcome toward outsiders,  
which caused significant conflict with the Pharisees.  
It was like trying to run new software on an old-incompatible computer.

His message of grace, incompatible with the Pharisees' perspective,  
wouldn't fit with their legalistic rules, rituals and traditions.  
As Jesus interprets the conflict, vs. 36-38

*He also told them a parable: "No one tears a piece from a new garment and sews it on an old garment; otherwise the new will be torn, and the piece from the new will not match the old. And no one*

puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the new wine will burst the skins and will be spilled, and the skins will be destroyed. But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins.

Jesus is saying

that to try to attach the new fabric to the old clothe doesn't work  
but will eventually tear again making the garment even worse.

If you try to store new wine, unfermented wine in used wine skins  
the gas pressure of continuing fermentation  
will surely burst the dried and inflexible old wine skins...

... just as the new life and the relationship with God  
that following Jesus brings would burst and blow-out  
the self-righteous religious system of the Pharisees.

In the parable, Jesus is the new garment, the new covenant.

Jesus is the new wine that will burst their rituals & traditions...

... and so of course they object to the change Jesus brings, vs. 39

And no one after drinking old wine desires new wine, but says, 'The old is good.'  
That is exactly what was going in in the Luke text.

### **Sometimes Presbyterians can be like old wineskins.**

Change can be difficult, unfamiliar, uncomfortable & disquieting,  
but we are called to more than just comfort and easy complacency,  
for the world, culture & community around us is in desperate need.

In this broken world of trouble, confusion, struggle and strife,  
through the Lord's gifts and grace entrusted to each one of us,  
God intends to love, to heal and bless all of his creation,  
by directing that grace to flow freely through each of us,  
**for the Lord has equipped each of us to serve in wonderful ways.**

And faithful is letting that grace guide every aspect of our life,  
so that God's generosity, goodness and love can flow-out from us...  
... which points to our Creator who equipped and gifted us  
to lead lives of effective and meaningful discipleship.

### **Jesus calls & blesses the most unlikely for them to bless others.**

He goes to the wrong dinner parties, eats with the wrong people.  
His public ministry was about crawling across the floor to love  
and to hold in his arms **one wrecked and broken life after another...**  
... which calls us to a faith that is really about our choices,  
how we respond once we find out **how very much we are loved.**

### **We are called to serve as conduits through which God's love can flow.**

We are each one called by God to demonstrate a new quality of life,  
in the church, and through the church out into our community,  
by living in ways consistent with reconciliation and grace.

I spoke with the father of a girl just getting started at Salt & Light,  
and he told me how very much she is enjoying being able to come here.  
She looks forward to it and tells her parents all about it.

That lead to a conversation about the great needs in our community,  
how hard the Covid-lockdowns were on families and children,  
and how much that S&L ministry helps and matters these days.

**The needs around us are huge and together we are making a difference,  
as one by one we are touching human lives with God's grace and hope.**

Things around here are not going back to exactly as they used to be,  
but God is up to something here that is new, amazing and great,  
a place of hope & sanctuary to meet the changing needs around us.

**Our old wineskins aren't sufficient for holding the Lord's new wine,**  
and though, to reach the summit does require more effort,  
that view is well worth whatever it takes to get us there.

At the Lord's Table today consider the Good News of truth and promise,  
and reflect on how to respond to God's call **to you**, and **to all of us**:

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see,  
everything has become new! Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. **I am  
about to do a new thing.** ... but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to  
what lies ahead, **I press on toward the goal** for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

(2 Corinthians 5:17, Isaiah 43:18, Philippians 3:13-14)