

Location: First Baptist Church, November 5, 2023

Title: Starting Over

(Theme: God extends grace to all)

Text: *Isaiah 43:16-21*

16 Thus says the Lord, who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters, 17 who brings out chariot and horse, army and warrior; they lie down; they cannot rise; they are extinguished, quenched like a wick: 18 Do not remember the former things or consider the things of old. 19 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. 20 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, 21 the people whom I formed for myself so that they might declare my praise.

Life can be challenging at times. The world can wear us down, and circumstances in our lives can dishearten and discourage us. Sometimes, we might start to feel like the Old Testament prophet Elijah, who, even though he had seen great victory in the past, reached a point where he just wanted to lie down and give up.

As we consider some of the struggles of our own lives, we can look at the natural world around us and see something very similar. Human beings, animals, and nature have their natural cycles of ebb and flow, rising up and falling down, good times and bad. That is the way of the world in which we live.

Many people respond to these cycles of life in one of two ways. Some retreat into the past, mourning that things are not like they used to be and allowing that to become something that colours their perception of everything around them, and others throw themselves into imagining some future where

everything will be just what they hope. The problem with both of these approaches is that the today that we live in remains unchanged and unaddressed.

God, however, calls us to something altogether different. He calls us to live today in the full realization that he is there to renew and strengthen his people moment by moment. God is, always has been, and always will be the creator. As such, he delights in doing something new at every moment. God has no yesterday or tomorrow; God simply is--here and now. That is why Scripture so often speaks prophetically, as though future events have already happened. To God, they have, but for us who live in linear time, we must get there from here. For us, God was present in the past, is present in today, and will be present in times to come. As our brother reminded us last week, God is already there.

God has already dealt with the dryness, discouragement, and weariness we may feel at any given moment. Our wilderness is no challenge to God; he has already made a way through it. Our thirst causes no issue because God has supplied rivers of refreshing water to slake our thirst. Of course, we find all of this in His Son Jesus Christ. Do you need rest, refreshment, and encouragement? You have it all in Christ. Isn't it strange that even the wild animals who live lives of unimaginably brutal challenge and difficulty know enough to depend on the

provision of their creator, and yet we “higher beings” have such a hard time with that thought?

The Scriptures teach us that God created us for his good purposes, but we cannot fulfill that purpose when we dwell in the past or the future, causing us to be ineffective and unusable in what we call today. When it seems we have lost our way, God offers us the hope of a new beginning today.

Every moment God gives us is saturated with his grace as an opportunity to start over and have a fresh beginning. Perhaps that is why God wanted you to be here and to hear his message this morning.

Did you ever find yourself wishing you could start over? Do you feel like that now? Listen to his words: ***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.*** (vv.18-19). You have his offer in front of you today, and this table before us is a perfect opportunity to say to God, “I want a new beginning.” Christ stands ready to forgive, renew, and restore you. Grace awaits. The time to start over is now. God bless you as you reach out to him. Amen.