

"Never Lose Sight of The Privilege!"

The book of Ecclesiastes declares: "There is nothing new under the sun." Some, however, seem to think differently about this. The New York Times Business section once declared, "Something New Under the Sun." The article was about a new model of automobile with all kinds of things never tried before with a car. The new car model had wipers on the headlights, separate thermostats for the driver and front seat passenger, a memory system that recalls how each regular driver likes to sit in the seat and so on. Something new about all of that? Well, I don't know – it doesn't seem to be all that important.

But there really is something new for all. God has made possible a new life for you and me through our Savior Jesus Christ. It is only God who can bring about a change that involves the promise of eternal life. Only God is able to form a people for Himself that are called His very own children. "Never Lose Sight of the Privilege!"

We are sometimes tempted to think that God needs us, the kingdom would suffer greatly without us and that God chose us because he realized what an "asset" we would be to Him – all faulty thinking. Before God announces the new thing he is about to do, he recalls for his people one of the greatest things he did for them in the past. So God makes reference to his miraculous deliverance of the Hebrews from the pursuing Egyptian army at the Red Sea. God's people at that time had just escaped from four hundred years of slavery to the Egyptians. They were making their way out of Egypt when they came to the shore of the Red Sea. When they looked back over their shoulder, they were terrified at the sight of the Egyptian army in hot pursuit of them. They didn't know what to do. They seemed to be trapped against the sea.

At the very last minute, God intervened. Without God's coming to their help, they were lost. He parted the waters of the Red Sea so that the hundreds of thousands of his people could cross over to the other side without even getting their feet wet. When the Egyptian army tried to follow them through the path in the sea, God caused the towering walls of water to come together again, drowning the Egyptian soldiers and horses in the process. What a miracle the Lord displayed! God recalls it in our text with these words: "He made a way through the sea, a path through the mighty waters, he drew out the chariots and horses, the army and reinforcements together, and they lay there, never to rise again, extinguished, snuffed out like a wick."

The smashing deliverance from the Egyptian army became the cornerstone event of the Jewish people's spiritual history. This event was remembered through all the ages to follow. But God did not stop doing new things after the parting of the Red Sea. God would continue to help his people in ways they never imagined. In speaking the second half of our text, Isaiah was pointing God's people ahead to that time when the Lord would deliver them from their captivity in Babylon. As you know, God permitted the nation of Babylon to take his people into captivity because his people refused to follow him wholeheartedly. In a very miraculous way, God promised his people that he would bring them back from their captivity in Babylon.

Let's hear the Lord describe this rescue: "See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland. The wild animals honor me, the jackals and the owls, because I provide water in the desert and streams in the wasteland to give drink to my people, my chosen.." God promised that he would bring his people back to their country, back to Jerusalem. Do you see how that miracle was, in a way, the exact opposite of their rescue at the Red Sea? There, God made a dry path through the waters. Here, God is saying he would provide waters through the dry wilderness his people would have to cross in order to get back home. Without water, God's people would have

perished in the searing heat of the Syrian desert. What a miracle! Even the wild animals would somehow nod their appreciation over what the Lord was doing.

It's important for us to consider at this point that all this saving activity was done totally and solely by the Lord himself. His pronoun, "I," is the subject of all the verbs, used four crucial times. Whatever great act God would perform to help his people was done without any kind of help. In fact, God came to the aid of his people, he gave them a "new thing" when they had given up. The children of Israel had given up when they saw the Egyptian army approaching at the Red Sea. They ended up almost cursing God. The exiles in Babylon thought for sure that there was no way in all of God's creation they would ever get back home again.

Doesn't that kind of thinking sound familiar? This is the nature of your salvation – God has done it all, he saved you when you were unable to save yourself – in fact, everything you could do would not help but would hurt your chance of ever being saved! God often acts in spite of our doubts and lack of faith. God doesn't need us the way we need Him! In fact, His kingdom would continue on and continue on well even if we weren't a part of it. We are prone to forget that the good we are and have it not because of us but it's by God's grace and by His work that we live and have a place.

The way we act often shows how prone we are to forget God's grace. Like the tenants in today's Gospel parable, you tire even of God and His ways when He doesn't act the way you want. Haven't most of us at sometime forgotten our Savior to the point that we mistakenly think we have a better idea of what should be done and how life should be lived. We find ourselves looking at life with the doubter's eye and mind, firmly stating, "There's nothing that's going to be able to help me!"

The Lord has a rebuke for you in our text, too: "See, I am doing a new thing! ... Do you not perceive it?" If we are at all honest with ourselves and with God, we must admit that we, too, have forgotten, we also have not always confessed that God knows what He's doing and His way is best. Sometimes we even want to go it alone and do things our way. The road we travel on our own is the road to hell – we may think God chose us to be His own because we're an asset for Him but the opposite is the case – we're lost people by nature. To bring us back around, the Lord calls to our attention the new he's given us. He reminded Israel of two great things, new things he did and would do. But his supreme new thing was still coming and it came for you and me, too!

God's supreme new thing for us took place on Calvary's hill and at Easter's empty tomb. The death of Jesus on the cross and his resurrection from the grave are the greatest and newest things God could have ever done. They are the greatest and newest because through Jesus' death for our sin and resurrection for our life a path has been opened for us. This path is to heaven. There really is something new under the Son – S-O-N – a way to God himself. Because he took away our sin through his death, Jesus offers you forgiveness of sin. He says, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me." He's inviting you to trust him for eternal life. A news item reported that broken plastic milk jugs are being used as an experiment in laying a roadbed. It was the broken body of God's Son on Calvary's cross that became the roadbed for our return to God. Jesus proclaimed, "I am the way."

Trust him. And live your life like you really have found something totally new, totally different, totally worth living for. God says in our text that he has shown favor to his people so "that they may proclaim my praise." God did what He did to give you a different view of life – His work His way! What has happened to us spiritually is similar to what happened to a James Kemp physically. Mr. Kemp found himself last summer in a single-engine plane that was hurtling out of control from the airstrip he was trying to reach in Weddington, North Carolina. A section of the plane's tail that provides stability had fallen off. The plane dropped from 9500 feet to 1500

feet in a few seconds. The plane started to skim over houses and Kemp thought he was going to die. But the plane slammed into the soft ground just off the runway and Kemp walked away only with some pulled back muscles. He told reports this: "Thank you, God! Thank you, God!"

Similarly, our lives were out of control and we were in a spiritual death plunge. Salvation must come from God. But we were saved because God intervened by sending Jesus to die for our sin, in our place. God didn't have to choose me – He can bring water out of desert rocks! Remember today's Gospel lesson – the tenants forgot their place – they didn't own the vineyard, they had been allowed to manage it. So also, we can forget our place, our pride can take over and we can easily forget that we don't own the Church or keep it together. How different life looks when I see myself this way. How twisted life becomes, how distorted my view of myself and think when I lose sight of the privilege God has given! We need the humility to say: "I'm only here because God has allowed me!" Look at the warning – the vineyard was taken away from the proud and given to others! Now it's time for us to be doing some thanking in our lives for this great new thing God has done for us! Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" "See," the Lord says again in our text, "I am doing a new thing... that they may proclaim my praise."

Will I accept that God forms His Church, His Way and – no matter the setbacks – consider it a privilege that He has included me? It's not a right to which I'm entitled but a privilege given! We may not always understand God's ways and all the 'whys', but our aim should always be to honor the Lord and praise Him for His goodness. John the Baptist said: "He must increase, I must decrease." We need the humility to submit to Him. The great Christian is small enough to let God be great and trusting God to be God is the mark of greatness.

Pray for an increase of humility so that you always see your salvation as a precious privilege and gift! In the parable of the tenants in today's Gospel, the tenants forgot they were just tenants or managers and felt they were owed more and deserved better. May we never forget that God doesn't owe us anything – anything good we are and have is to be received with thanks as humble servants. God in His grace has given you a place at His side and you are blessed as a result!