

## A New Normal Isaiah 43.18-20

Let me tell you about my “normal” Sunday morning...

- The apartment is a mess! If I stumbled over one box I stumbled over six!
- I couldn't find the shoes I wanted!
- I came “this” close to forgetting my keys!
- My cat is exhibiting some rather neurotic behavior (think she is getting it from me?)
- There wasn't much about my morning that was normal...it almost made me wish I was on a different ministry path so that my life could get back to “normal;” you know, normal, the way things used to be.

In general, whenever we are faced with change and transitions we find ourselves longing for life to get back to normal. As this interim time comes to an end and the arrival of a new installed pastor is anticipated some of you may be thinking “oh good, now things can get back to normal.” Well, I hate to be the one to burst your bubble but as author Patsy Clairmont once said:

“Normal is just a setting on the dryer.” If we stop and think about it for a moment we will realize that our lives are full of transitions that change what we call normal:

Getting married is the first that comes to mind – there isn't much that doesn't fall into the “new thing” category for newlyweds: new spouse, new place to live, new families, new names, new chores, new habits and idiosyncrasies to smile at, and sometimes tolerate. And yet those new things become our normal.

Relocating to a new city, something I've had a little experience with! New place to live, new church, new grocery store, new hair stylist. Pretty soon however (well, within the first year anyway) it all becomes familiar and one day you realize it has become so normal you find yourself saying “my city, my church, my stylist.”

Starting a new job – new people, new work routines, new schedules, new desk and yet as time passes we adjust and the job is no longer new – it becomes a part of our normal day.

Retirement –by its very nature retirement forces people into a new normal. The routines of the past don't apply anymore; activities change, sleep habits might change, perhaps even eating schedules changes. Retirement routines soon become the new normal.

These life events change things. In fact, it can be quite a shock when we realize that we've stepped into a future that is not only unknown but will result in a new normal. Getting married, moving, changing jobs, retiring are all, in a way, like entering a wilderness. These new places may be beautiful but they are a wilderness all the same in the sense that nothing may feel safe, tame or predictable on this new journey.

Sometimes in the midst of the turmoil and anxiety of change we forget who the author of our life is and we spend unnecessary time worrying and fretting about the future. We are so like the Israelites that it was pretty much a no brainer for me to turn to the Old Testament to remind myself about what God has to say about change.

I was soon led to Isaiah 43 where God is reminding the people about who he is. In the first 14 verses God reminds the people that he is their creator, restorer, protector, the one who loves them, their gatherer and their savior. He reminds them that he is the Lord their God, the Holy one who proclaims through word and action that they are his chosen people.

In verses 15-20 God continues to state who he is and then makes a statement about what he is going to do: "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland. The wild animals honor me, the jackals and the owls, because I provide water in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland, to give drink to my people, my chosen..."

“Forget the former things...” Forgetting is so contrary to our human inclinations (at least until we reach a certain age!) We struggle to overcome bad habits, we find it difficult to let go of old hurts and sorrows, we cling to what is familiar even when it isn't necessarily a positive thing.

In this verse God is telling Israel to forget about the previous ways in which he saved them and look forward to the new and spectacular way he is will deliver them in the future. In order to look to the future God tells them to

“Don't dwell on the past” God continues. There are at least two ways in which hanging on to the past can be a problem. The first is when we romanticize the past remembering it as being more positive than it really was.

The Israelites provide us with some early examples of romanticizing the past. The first time they did it was shortly after Moses led them out of slavery in Egypt. Moses and the Israelites were being pursued by Pharaoh's army when they found themselves on the shore of an inland sea that they had no way of crossing.

As Pharaoh's army came into view the Israelites were so terrified they yelled at Moses saying “Didn't we say to you in Egypt, 'leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert.” Seems they conveniently forgot that they had begged God to help them!

Another time they romanticized the past happened about two and a half months later as they were wandering in the wilderness. At that time the Israelites began to grumble about not having enough food and even went so far as to claim that while they were slaves in Egypt they had sat around pots of meat and ate all the food they wanted. Somehow they managed to completely forget that as slaves they had to do back breaking labor while being fed very little.

The second problem with hanging on to the past happens when we expect the future to be the same as the past. This expectation can take two forms – one of which is expecting that the negative experiences we have had in the past are going to repeat themselves. A friend of mine is fond of saying that what we mutter matters. If we mutter in our

hearts or with our lips that our past negative experiences are going to happen again our minds are closed to seeing, hearing, or trying anything new. And, even worse, what we are really saying is that we don't trust God!

The other is having the expectation that the future will look just like the past - what we consider the good old days...by the way, keep in mind that each generation's "good old days" are different! So here's the bottom line – the future will never look like anyone's good old days!

Whatever our expectations, there are no guarantees about the future – either negative or positive. What we have is this day, this moment. What unfolds in the future will be a new way of looking at and experiencing life and ministry. A way that will one day be the new normal.

In verse 19 it is recorded that God says "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." God is doing a new thing here at FCBC. God is bringing a new pastor who will bring a new energy and a new way of living out God's plan for FCBC and its ministries.

God is making a way for you to move through this transition time into your new normal. When you and Pastor Ong begin your ministry together your normal will not be a return to the past – it will be the beginning of a new and exciting future – a new and exciting normal.

Don't be afraid to embrace the future because God has a plan for you all, a plan to give you hope and a future. Whatever your new normal turns out to be – go into it knowing that God is faithful, God loves you and God will never abandon you.