

Something New

God promises something new is on the way. The whole creation reflects God's fresh workings. Tears yield to joy. The past makes room for the future. Gestures of extravagant love and devotion abound. The people of God see a way where once there had seemed to be no way. The springing forth of God's future encourages us to move into it with confidence.

Focus Scripture: Isaiah 43:16–21

In this and other places in Isaiah 40–55, the prophet draws on traditions of God's former works, as evidenced in language ("waters," "formed") and story (verse 17). What God has done references God's work in creation and the deliverance of the Hebrew people from Egypt through the sea. What God promises to the people of this prophet's time is a new act of creation by an exodus from Babylon to Judah through the wilderness.

"Do not remember" may sound shocking to Jewish and, later, Christian listeners. Both traditions emphasize the positive role of remembrance. Does not Isaiah invoke the call to remember God (46:8–10)? All this underscores the importance of context in interpreting the prophetic word. There are times to look back. The church in the Season of Lent practices the discipline of returning to the stories of Jesus. With this text, Lenten study goes back even further to Isaiah. But there are also times to look forward. "Do not remember" in this passage serves two purposes. It invites Israel to set aside the disaster of exile. It also invites the people to not assume God will always work in the same ways. This message has importance for the church's teaching and preaching. Isaiah and the Bible have many messages, some of which seem to lead us in opposite directions. For example, are we to "remember" or are we to "not remember"? The key is discerning when the context is right for each call.

The creation imagery of Isaiah in this passage leads to an extraordinary word. The earth itself is given voice. Isaiah does not simply say God does things that create change in creation. In verse 20, creation itself responds to and with the creative activity of God. The passage invites us to consider what

it might mean for people of faith to listen for the voice and witness of the earth.

The passage concludes with God "forming" God's people (translating the same Hebrew word used for Adam's fashioning in Genesis 2:7–8). Community formation is an act of God. But formation also waits upon the people's readiness. History reveals that only a minority of the exiles chose to return.

God continues to be in the work of forming community today. "Do not remember" may be a clue to us that our call, like theirs, involves a decision to stop living in the past and start living toward God's new ways.

The additional readings proclaim that to live with openness to God's presence and ways may require us to accept that these may or may not conform to our past experience. **Psalm 126** celebrates the turning of old in new, of tears giving way to joy. The mixing of past and future tenses in the verbs of the psalm suggests this newness is both now and yet to come. Paul in **Philippians 3:4b–14** sees his own life re-created by God's ways. His goal of "pressing on" toward God's call leads Paul, like Isaiah, to "forget what lies behind" for the sake of what lies ahead. In **John 12:1–8**, Jesus does not dismiss the need to be responsive to the poor. Rather, Jesus affirms Mary's – and our – responsiveness to the newness of his presence.

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The presence and promise of God's new ways invites and encourages us to move forward with eyes open to new possibilities of God's working among and through us. What parts of the past might you and your church need to let go of in order to be open to God's renewal of your lives and creation? What gives you cause to see and celebrate God's continuing work of re-creation?



March 21, 2010

Focus Scripture
Isaiah 43:16–21

Additional Scriptures
Psalm 126
Philippians 3:4b–14
John 12:1–8

God of creation, form us as your people. Form us to learn from the past, but not live in it, as we move into your future. Form us to listen for your voice – springing forth in creation, breaking out in Spirit, and calling all to something new. Amen.

If you have Internet access, visit www.spiritseasons.com to access Spirit Sightings for connections between current events and the focus passage.

The Focus for Ages 5–12

Children react to participating in new things in different ways. One child will walk eagerly into a new situation, full of expectation and ready to go. Another child will stand at the edges, waiting to see how everything works or waiting to be invited to participate. Similarly, the children in your group may take differently to God's message about a new thing spoken through Isaiah. Allow each child space to hear this message in her or his own way.

Beneath this promise of something new from God is the assurance of God's care, love, and goodness. Children cannot hear this message too often or experience a sample of this love too many times. Isaiah's words from God and your caring attention to each child are the meat of this session. Consider how you will meet the needs of each child in your group.

Pray that the children will encounter signs of God's goodness throughout their lives.

March 21, 2010



Materials needed

Before the session

- ❑ Prayerfully reflect on this week's focus scripture, Isaiah 43:16–21, and biblical background material (p. 35). What new thing do you pray for?
- ❑ Bring *basic supply kit* (see p. 2) and, if possible, *Seasons Music CD, vol. 8* and *CD player*. *Seasons .mp3 Downloads* are available for purchase from www.spiritseasons.com.
- ❑ Bring songs "You Are Holy/Hamba Nathi," "River Running in You and Me," and "Rest and Wait" (pp. 11, 4, and 9 in *Music Section*; also on #21, #26, and #7 on *Seasons Music CD*).
- ❑ Bring footprints from February 21, 2010 (see Prepare).

Gather

- ❑ Prepare worship table with *purple cloth*, *Christ candle*, *matches*, *Bible*, and *offering basket*. Place *bookmark* at the beginning of Isaiah.
- ❑ Bring *poster "BCE Door Lock."*

Engage

- ❑ Prepare to tell the story on *today's resource sheet "A Way in the Wilderness."*
- ❑ For chant group, bring *today's resource sheet "A Way in the Wilderness."*
- ❑ For choral reading group, bring *today's resource sheet "Isaiah 43:16–21"* and *directions*.

Respond

Gather materials for the zone selected.

- ❑ **Art zone:** *ribbon or fabric strips*, *twigs*, *piece of burlap* (30 cm x 60 cm/12 in x 24 in), *yarn*, *embroidery thread*, *dowel*, and *resource sheet "Woven Banner"* (p. 118). In advance, prepare the burlap as directed on the resource sheet.
- ❑ **Drama zone:** *copies of today's resource sheet "Isaiah 43:16–21"* and (optional) *videotaping equipment*
- ❑ **Music zone:** song "Rest and Wait" (p. 9, *Music Section*; also #7 on *Seasons Music CD*) and (optional) *rhythm instruments* and *bells*
- ❑ **Outreach zone:** *copies of today's resource sheet "Something Brand-new"*



Something New

Scripture

Isaiah 43:16–21

FOCUS To participate in God's vision of new things.

GATHER

Welcome the children and introduce guests or new children to the others. Engage them in conversation about how they have observed Lent at home. Play the song “You Are Holy/*Hamba Nathi*” (p. 11, *Music Section*; also #21 on *Seasons Music CD*) as the signal to gather at the worship table.

Opening ritual

Lent Quickly review the Season of Lent (40 days from Ash Wednesday to Easter, not including the Sundays; a time of preparation for the celebration of Easter; colour purple suggests royalty; a time to examine how we are living as God's people and how we might live more faithfully; some people think of Lent as a journey that they travel with Jesus and try to learn from Jesus). Try to get the children to recall this information rather than telling them. Light the Christ candle.

Sing “You Are Holy/*Hamba Nathi*” (p. 11, *Music Section*; also #21 on *Seasons Music CD*). If the children do not know the song, invite them to hum along with the music. If you take up an offering, this can happen during the song.

Pray If there are new children, explain the process for praying with the footprints. They will move together from footstep to footstep echoing each

word from the footprints after you say it. After “We pray for,” they are welcome to name places or people they want to pray for. After everyone who wishes has prayed, move to “Amen” and say it together. Perhaps a child would like to lead it.

To indicate that the opening ritual is over, have the children gather up the footprints and place them on the worship table. Extinguish the Christ candle.

Connecting with the focus

Art conversation Look at the poster *BCE Door Lock* together. Explain that it is on a house built during the Iron Age (8th to 4th centuries BCE). Ask:

- **How do you think this door lock works?**

See “About the Art” (p. 125) for more information about this photograph. After examining the photograph and explaining how the lock works, have the children concentrate on the tiny sliver of the outdoors that can be seen between the door and the doorframe. Ask:

- **What do you imagine is outside this door?**

After hearing their ideas, explain that the Bible passage today is about something new, not yet seen, much as the outdoors at this house is to our eyes.

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ENGAGE

Preparing for the story

Back to Isaiah Invite a child to get the Bible from the worship table. Before the Bible is opened to the bookmark, ask the child to hold it so everyone can see where the bookmark is in closed book in relation to the front of the Bible. Ask:

- **Based on where the bookmark has been for other stories during Lent, what book of the Bible do you think it is marking today?**

Praise the children for their educated guesses, especially if they get it right.

The Bible story

God's vision Recall with the group that the book of Isaiah is one that Jesus read, so it is very old, and that Isaiah spoke these words from God to the people. Tell the story from today's resource sheet “A Way in the Wilderness,” based on *Isaiah 43:16–21*. After the story, ask:

- **What does Isaiah say is the “something new” that God is doing?**

You are not looking for a “correct” answer, but to encourage the children to ponder what this something new from God could be.

Exploring the story further

To enable the children to explore the story further, according to interests and abilities, explain the two options and have each child select one.

Chant group God's plan to do something brand-new is the focus for this Bible passage. The children will relate it to the paraphrase on today's resource sheet "A Way in the Wilderness" by speaking a response as they hear it again. Begin with the third paragraph of the story (God had a message for the people...). Then after each line, beginning with the fourth paragraph, have them say in unison: **God is doing something new!** Rehearse it so they speak it together with enthusiasm. After the lines naming animals, invite the children to suggest additional creatures. After each suggestion, say the response.

Choral reading group This option is for confident readers. Provide copies of today's resource sheet "Isaiah 43:16-21" and these directions:

1 Take a copy of "Isaiah 43:16-21."

This is how one Bible tells Isaiah's message from God. In the tiny print at the bottom of the page, you can see that this way of saying it comes from a Bible called "The Message."

You are going to read these words as a choral reading. Decide who will be in Group 1 and who in Group 2.

2 Get into your groups and practice reading your lines together.

3 Then bring both groups together and read the Isaiah passage.



The Bible story and us

Play the song "River Running in You and Me" (p. 4, *Music Section*; also #26 on *Seasons Music CD*) as the signal to come together. The chant group can present part of their reading of Isaiah and the choral reading group can present their way of reading it. Ask:

■ **What is exciting about something new from God?**

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RESPOND

Invite the children to select a zone and work with the materials there.

□ **Art zone: Woven banner** In Isaiah's words, all creation rejoices at God's new ways. Recall the children's answers to the question at the end of Engage. Include them in the woven banner as additional praise to God. See the resource sheet "Woven Banner" (p. 118) for directions. Display the banner by the worship table or elsewhere in the church building for others to enjoy.

□ **Lent zone: Prayers** We can pray for people and groups, even ourselves, who are encountering new things. Provide writing paper, pencils, and these directions:

1 Think about people you know or people in the news who are facing new things. Perhaps a storm destroyed their homes or they have moved to a new country. Perhaps you are facing something new and a bit scary too.

2 Write your prayer on a slip of paper and fold it very tiny.

3 You can keep your prayer with you or tuck it into the banner being woven in the art zone.

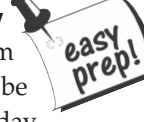


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❑ **Drama zone: Ads** In *The Message*, which is found on today's resource sheet "Isaiah 43:16–21", the people are told, "Be alert, be present. I'm about to do something brand-new." In today's world, a new product is rolled out with fanfare before anyone sees it. Ads are planned to get our attention. Provide copies of today's resource sheet "Isaiah 43:16–21" for reference. Invite the children to work in pairs or threes to develop some ads to get people excited about God's new thing. They can present the ads during Bless. If possible, videotape them.
- ❑ **Music zone: Song in the wilderness** In the first session for Lent, the children were introduced to the song "Rest and Wait" (p. 9, *Music Section*; also #7 on *Seasons Music CD*), which has been included in Bless during Lent. In the first session for Lent, the story was of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness. Isaiah's words bring us hope as we look at the wilderness. Ask:

■ **How might we sing this song so it will reflect the excitement of the brand-new thing God is doing?**

You might have rhythm instruments and bells on hand as one way of adding a new feeling to this song.

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❑ **Outreach zone: Contemporary scenarios** The ancient words from God spoken through Isaiah can be helpful as we face challenges today. Invite a child to read the opening paragraphs on today's resource sheet "Something Brand-new." Then discuss one or more of the scenarios on the resource sheet. The children may prefer to act out their responses to the questions.

As you think about this zone with the children in your group, consider whether you might want to write additional scenarios to suit them better.



- Gather** Play "River Running in You and Me" (p. 4, *Music Section*; also #26 on *Seasons Music CD*) as the signal to gather at the worship table.
- Ads** Have the children from the drama zone present their ads.
- Sing** "Rest and Wait" (p. 9, *Music Section*; also #7 on *Seasons Music CD*). Add embellishments prepared in the music zone.

Pray this prayer, or one of your own:

God, we are thankful for all the new things you bring to us. Help us to see them. Amen.

Blessing Say to each child, "(Child's name), God's world is new every day."



What kinds of new things did the children expect from God? How did they show their excitement for God's brand-new things?
Where in your life do you seek new things from God?

Next week is Palm Sunday and the following week, Easter. Is there any change in your educational schedule that you need to take into account during these two weeks?



A way in the wilderness

based on Isaiah 43:16–21

Use your voice to express the excitement of waiting for something new from God.

Doing something new can be scary. The Hebrew people wanted to return to Jerusalem, but starting across the desert wilderness was scary. What if they got lost? What if wild animals followed them? What if they ran out of water? What if? What if? What if?

They did remember that many, many years before, their ancestors had travelled from Egypt across the wilderness. But still, it looked scary.

God had a message for the people. God gave that message to Isaiah to tell them. Isaiah reminded the people that there were lovely and pleasant things in the desert too. But Isaiah also told the people to forget about what was scary because God was going to do a new thing.

Isaiah reminded the people that all of creation will praise God for doing a new thing, which will be more wonderful than anything that had happened before.

The wild creatures will thank God.

Coyotes and buzzards will praise God!

Dingoes and emus will praise God.

Hyenas and ostriches will praise God.

Wolves and cranes will praise God.

Isaiah went on with the message from God.

God will be with you and care for you as you travel through the desert.

God will give you water to drink.

Praise God for something new, something waiting to burst forth!



ISAIAH 43:16–21

Divide into two groups and then read the following script to learn about the new thing God is doing.

Group 1: This is what God says,
the God who builds a road right through the ocean,
who carves a path through pounding waves,

Group 2: The God who summons horses and chariots and armies –
they lie down and then can't get up;
they're snuffed out like so many candles:

Group 1: "Forget about what's happened;
don't keep going over old history.

Group 2: Be alert, be present.

Group 1: I'm about to do something brand-new.

Group 2: It's bursting out! Don't you see it?
There it is! I'm making a road through the desert,
rivers in the badlands.

Group 1: Wild animals will say 'Thank you!' –
The coyotes and the buzzards –

Group 2: Because I provided water in the desert,
rivers through the sun-baked earth,
Drinking water for the people I chose,

Group 1: the people I made especially for myself,
a people custom-made to praise me."

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SOMETHING BRAND-NEW

The prophet Isaiah held up a vision of hope and courage for the people in a very difficult time. Isaiah describes the way God will deliver the exiles, and compares God's love in that circumstance with the way God delivered the Hebrew people in the exodus. Even though the situation is different, Isaiah reminds us that God's steadfast love never changes. God is able to make a new way.

Sometimes life brings us challenges and we have trouble recognizing the opportunities in those challenges. How can we help one another find a way through when there seems to be no way? Think about each of these scenarios. Imagine what new way God could make through these challenges.

Sasha is worried because her parents are divorcing and she will be going to live with her mother in a new city. She has to change schools and make new friends. She feels sad about leaving everything that is familiar to her – her home, her neighbourhood, her friends, her school, and her church family.

Isaiah helped the people of Judah see a way where there seemed to be no way. How could Sasha see God's love at work in this new way for her family? I wonder:

- **Who are the people who can help Sasha by holding up a vision of a new way of being family?**
- **What might we do to help Sasha find a way through to a new way of being family, rather than looking back?**
- **How can we be reminders to Sasha of God's love and care?**

Herman's temper is getting the better of him. Whenever things don't go his way, he bursts out with angry words and hurtful actions. The other day his younger brother accidentally knocked over his bike and Herman went into an angry rage. He called his brother unkind names and broke one of his brother's favourite toys.

The prophet helped the people of Judah living in exile in Babylon see a new way where there seemed to be no way. I wonder:

- **What might that new way be for Herman?**
- **Who are the people who can help Herman find a way through to a new way of expressing his feelings in frustrating situations?**
- **How might we hold up a vision for Herman of a new way of handling himself when he's angry?**

Tory's grandmother had cancer and died. Tory was very close to her grandmother and spent a lot of time at her house. Since her grandmother died, Tory has been depressed and cries a lot. She doesn't want to play with her friends or go anywhere. She misses her grandmother and wishes she were with her again.

Isaiah brought a message of God's steadfast love to the people who were so sad and frustrated about their unfair situation. I wonder:

- **What message might Tory need to hear when she is feeling so sad and lonely?**
- **Who are the people who could hold up a vision for Tory of a new way of feeling close to her grandmother?**
- **In what ways might we be messengers of God's steadfast love to Tory in such a difficult time?**