

January 1, 2006  
Patchogue Church of the Nazarene

“What Time is New Year?”  
Isa 43:1-3a, 16-21 NCV (New Century Version)

Now this is what the LORD says.  
He created you, people of Jacob;  
he formed you, people of Israel.  
He says, "Don't be afraid, because I have saved you.  
I have called you by name, and you are mine.  
2 When you pass through the waters, I will be with you.  
When you cross rivers, you will not drown.  
When you walk through fire, you will not be burned,  
nor will the flames hurt you.  
3 This is because I, the LORD, am your God,  
the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.

16 This is what the LORD says.  
He is the one who made a road through the sea  
and a path through rough waters.  
17 He is the one who defeated the chariots and horses  
and the mighty armies.  
They fell together and will never rise again.  
They were destroyed as a flame is put out.  
18 The LORD says, "Forget what happened before,  
and do not think about the past.  
19 Look at the new thing I am going to do.  
It is already happening. Don't you see it?  
I will make a road in the desert  
and rivers in the dry land.  
20 Even the wild animals will be thankful to me —  
the wild dogs and owls.  
They will honor me when I put water in the desert  
and rivers in the dry land  
to give water to my people, the ones I chose.  
21 The people I made  
will sing songs to praise me.

*What time is New Year?* Well, we all know the New Year officially began when the ball came down and the year 2006 lit up. When I was a kid we always celebrated New Year's Eve at my aunt Marion and uncle Pete's house (they were my god-parents, aunt Marion was my mom's oldest sister, the oldest of four girls: Marion, the English version of Marriann, Dotty - Delorata, my mom, Angie, short for Angelina and the youngest, Josie for Josephine). Now, my Aunt Marion knew how to do New Year's Eve. Plenty of food and plenty of people. Minutes before the ball was to drop she would hand out

noisemakers to me and all my cousins, there were 16 cousins. My favorite noisemaker, the one I requested every year, was a big pasta pot and wooden spoon. My cousin Margaret, the oldest of the cousins would have the honor of having the big bell to ring. With ten seconds left we would all join in the count down, "10, 9, 8, 7, 6,5,4,3,2,1," and all would yell "Happy New Year!" And the kids enjoyed making a lot of noise, while our parents kissed, and aunt Dotty cried as Guy Lombardo's band played Auld Lang Seine on the TV. Then everyone would go around kissing and hugging everyone else, my mom would tell aunt Dotty, "don't cry, if you cry tonight it means you are going to be crying all year." Then Margaret would get to go outside on the front stoop of her house and ring that big bell three times...and the New Year had officially started.

I often wondered why my aunt would cry every New Year's Eve, actually all my aunts, and my mom and my grandmother would cry. I believe it was because they were happy and thankful that God had brought them through another year and they looked forward to a new year, a new beginning, a clean slate.

*What time is New Year?* A time for resolutions, a clean slate, a new beginning.

Once there was a young man who had made it big had been away from home a long time traveling to exotic places all over the world. He had not been very attentive to his widowed mother. His conscience began to bother him and he decided to do something about it. He sent her a unique gift, a rare South American parrot for which he'd paid \$1200.

Well, time went by. Two weeks, three weeks, and he heard nothing. And the fourth week he called. When he got his mom on the phone he said, "Did you get the bird I sent you?"

"Oh yes!"--It was so nice, I cooked it the day after it came. It was delicious!"

"You cooked it! Mom, that was a rare South American parrot. It cost me \$1200. That parrot could speak five languages."

"Five languages, responded the mother, "Then why didn't it say something?"

If only the parrot had spoke up. Or if only the son would have said something. I'm sure next time he will.

If only!

We hear it all the time. If only I hadn't had that accident. If only I'd lived in some other place. If only I were more beautiful. If only he had not died so young. If only people were friendlier to me. If only I had more money. If only I were younger. If only I were older. If only I had a different kind of job. If only people really knew my abilities. If only I was raised differently. If only--and it goes on and on. If only.

There is an alternative to "if only" it's "next time." There's a world of difference between "if only" and "next time." "If only" looks backward; "next time" is a look forward. "If only" is a word of defeat; "next time" is a word of hope.

Let's look at our scripture. Isaiah offers so much hope. The text at which we are looking today is a good text with which to live as we begin this New Year. Listen again as he quotes God speaking, Verse 19, "Look at the new thing I am going to do. It is already happening. Don't you see it?"

I like the way the amplified version puts it in the present tense: "Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth; do you not perceive and know it, and will you not give heed to it? I will even make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert."

I don't know how it is with you, but I like new beginnings. It doesn't matter whether it's a new year, a new month, a new week, a new day--a new experience--I like new beginnings. "A Jesuit priest, C.J. McNespy, once noted that scholars do not agree as to when the liturgical (church) year really begins. The usual opinion, of course, is the first Sunday of Advent. Others start with the Easter vigil. Still others choose the Sunday which comes seventy days before Easter. Father McNespy wraps up the controversy happily; "in any case, since we need to be constantly starting over, it doesn't hurt to have several new years." (C.J. McNespy, America, 1-25-64, p.149, quoted by Ellsworth Kalas, "Ring Out the Old" December 29, 1985)

I'll take as many new years, as many occasions for new beginnings--as the calendar or religion or life will give me. I'm glad for the chance for starting again. Everyday is a chance to start again. There is something to the A.A. motto, "One day at a time." That is all you have to do you know. You just have to get through today. Don't be depressed about the regrets of yesterday and don't worry about tomorrow. Just do what you are suppose to do right now. Jesus said it this way (Matt 6:34 NIV), "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

When we fail God forgives and gives us another new beginning. And that's the reason I wanted to anchor what we say today in this passage of scripture from Isaiah.

"Look at the new thing I am going to do. It is already happening. Don't you see it? I will make a road in the desert and rivers in the dry land."

For I am about to do a brand-new thing. See, I have already begun! Do you not see it? I will make a pathway through the wilderness for my people... I will create rivers for them in the desert! (NLT)

So it's against this background of God intervening in history, a God who is always doing a new thing--it's against that background that I want you to realize that you have these two approaches to life--if only/next time. We can learn from the mistakes of the past.

A husband said to his wife: "I don't want to brag, but here it is a new year and I've kept every one of my New Year's resolutions that I made last year."

"You have?" his wife questioned.

"Yes," said the husband, "I have kept everyone...I've kept them in a folder in the bottom draw of my desk!"

Some of us make resolutions like one man, named George, I heard about recently. He said to a friend: "There's nothing like getting up at six in the morning, going for a run around the park, and taking a brisk shower before breakfast."

His friend Bob asked, "How long have you been doing this?"

George said: "I start tomorrow."

Too often we live in the "if onlys." Our focus on and regrets of the past keep us from being effective in the present.

Paul gives us specific directions for living each day. Paul in Philippians says, "Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead..."(Phil 3:13 NIV)

Don't let the "if only's" of the past or any experience from the past keep you a prisoner of your fears. If you have ever been to a circus, you've no doubt seen the huge bull elephants chained to a peg in the ground. Perhaps it has occurred to you that the elephant could easily pull the peg out of the ground and escape. However, he does not try. As a baby elephant he was tied to a huge stake that he could not pull out of the ground. Weeks of pulling and tugging only wore a trench around the stake, and finally he gave up. Now that he is full-grown, with great strength and the physical ability to pull the peg out of the ground, he remembers only the futility of past efforts and does not even attempt to escape. He is conditioned to failure. If you are straining forward to what is ahead this New Year, let us make a fresh start and forget the things that may have been holding us back in the past.

(Dr. Arthur Caliendo, of Marble Collegiate Church, New York City)

Let me tell you another story from Rabbi Marc Gafni. Gafni recalls one of the first bar mitzvahs he ever performed. It was for a boy named Louis. Louis was awkward and sad. His insensitive parents did little to encourage his self-esteem. They implied that he was too dumb to learn the traditional Hebrew passages a boy recites for his bar mitzvah.

Rabbi Gafni was determined to bring out the best in Louis. He spent extra time teaching him the songs and prayers. He discovered that Louis was smart, and had a fantastic singing voice. On the day of his bar mitzvah, Louis performed beautifully. At the end of the ceremony, Rabbi Gafni stood and spoke directly to Louis. He said, "Louis, this morning you met your real self. This is who you are. You are good, graceful, talented,

and smart. Whatever people told you yesterday, and Louis, whatever happens tomorrow, promise me one thing. Remember . . . this is you. Remember, and don't ever lose it."

A few years later, Louis wrote to Rabbi Gafni. The boy whose parents predicted that he was too dumb to perform a traditional bar mitzvah was studying for his medical degree at an Ivy League university. He was also engaged to be married. Louis ended his letter by saying, ". . . I kept my promise---I always remembered my bar mitzvah morning when you said that this is who I am. For this, I thank you."

(Marc Gafni, *The Mystery of Love* (New York: Atria Books, 2003), pp. 120-121.)

*What time is New Year?*

This year you must not forget who you are: (Isa 43:1-3) "Now this is what the LORD says. He created you, people of Jacob; He formed you, people of Israel. He says, "Don't be afraid, because I have saved you. I have called you by name, and you are mine.

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you. When you cross rivers, you will not drown. When you walk through fire, you will not be burned, nor will the flames hurt you. This is because I, the LORD, am your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior."

The Lord says, "Don't be afraid." What reasons does He give you to not be afraid?

Isaiah tells us, He (The Lord) created and formed you and saved you.

God created you. You are not here by accident. God wanted you to exist. He loves you and has a purpose for your life.

He formed you. Through the things He has allowed you to experience in your life He has formed you and formed your character. The things we experience can make us bitter or better. God wants to use everything in your life for the good of making you like Jesus.

He saved you. When ever the Bible speaks of being saved or redeemed it implies that a price had to be paid. Jesus paid that price. Jesus was willing to die for you, why? Because you are His creation.

Therefore, you are precious to Him. He loves you and you are of great value to God, He created you and saved you. Don't be afraid.

Isaiah goes on to say, "He has called you by name." It denotes the intimacy of friendship. Jesus has made you a friend of God. "You are His," Isaiah says. Because He created you and formed you, and saved you, and called you, "you are His." Therefore don't be afraid. If while we were yet sinners Christ died for us, when we didn't even care about God, certainly He loves you now that you have accepted Him.

Therefore, since this is true, the Lord says, "when you pass through the waters, I will be with you. When you cross rivers, you will not drown. When you walk through fire, you will not be burned, nor will the flames hurt you."

*What time is New Year?* A time to remember God's promises.

The Bible often uses water and fire to denote calamity, disastrous situations, and the misery or distress caused by these difficult situations, because water overwhelms and fire consumes. So the Lord is promising, “when disastrous situations come, when you go through deep waters of great trouble, I will be with you. I will never leave you or forsake you. When misery or distress comes, when you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not be overwhelmed. You will not drown! When you walk through the fire of oppression, or cruelty, you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you.

“This is because (v3) I, the LORD, am your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.”

Newspapers and magazines covered the fascinating story of Admiral Richard Byrd's second trip to the South Pole. The 180th meridian is an imaginary but important marker. It is the International Date Line. When a traveler crosses it, he either adds a day or subtracts a day, depending on his direction.

Admiral Byrd spoke of his experience of flying southward to the pole: "All the time we continued flying as closely as possible along the 180th meridian. Even without wind drift -- for which adequate correction can be made -- it is obvious that no navigator can fly exactly along a mathematical straight line. Consequently, we were zigzagging constantly from today into tomorrow, and back again into yesterday."

*What time is new year?* At this season of the year our minds are crowded with recollections of the past year, some cheering and some sobering, but (v18-19) The LORD says, "Forget what happened before, and do not think about the past. Look at the new thing I am going to do. It is already happening. Don't you see it? I will make a road in the desert and rivers in the dry land."

“Forgetting what is behind (we strain) toward what is ahead...”(Phil 3:13 NIV), and we do it without fear of what the new year will bring (v3), “This is because I, the LORD, am your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.”