

## He Who Made A Way

The Bible is God's story. It is a holy story because it is a story about someone who is set apart from us...that's what holy means...and, here is the surprise to the story. The story is about a Holy (set apart) Spirit Being who created flesh and blood human beings to love and to love him. Now, of course, in order for these flesh and blood human beings to be with this Holy God, they must be holy (set apart) too. But they aren't holy, not by nature, so, how will God get his way? That is the story of the Bible. God's story is about how God makes a way for a not-holy people to be with a Holy God.

Why? Why would God do this? Why does God want to be with human beings? Because he made them; because he loves the things and the people he makes, just like you do (or should). So the Bible is a story of God making a way where there seems to be no way for the people to come home.

The first part of the story, what we call the "Old Testament", even though it is just as current and important as the "New Testament", the first part of God's story which is written down is about the people of Israel, the Hebrews, the Jewish nation. What does that story have to do with you and me? Well, what happens to the people of Israel is a story we tell because God says it is our story too. If we

want to understand why Jesus was born, died and raised, we first need to understand this part of the story, Israel's story, our story.

And that story begins in captivity. "This is what the Lord says" our scripture begins. (Isaiah 43:16-17). God is the main character in this story, because the Bible is God's story. So, when the Bible says 'This is what the Lord says' it is announcing something really important, not only because it is going to be God speaking, but because it is about to reveal something about God and something about us.

God is speaking to a people in captivity. They were captives in a place called Babylon, where they had been hauled away by the enemy, some 900 or maybe 1700 miles from home in Jerusalem. A really long ways away. And they had stopped believing that God was ever going to bring them home. Some of them stopped believing that God even was around anymore, or maybe if God ever was. Sound familiar? People are the same today as they were thousands of years ago, which is why the Bible's story is still important to us today.

So, what does God say to this doubting people, these despairing people, who thought they were trapped as slaves forever? Well, they are reminded by the prophet Isaiah that this God who is about to speak is the same God who brought

them from Egypt. (SLIDE) And, of course, in Egypt, they had been captives too.

That happens to us a lot. We keep repeating the cycle of becoming captives in our situations, stuck in cycles of behavior in which we become captive to our grief, to our shame, to our belief that there is no way out.



So the prophet gives them a reminder, stuck there in Babylon. Remember that this Yahweh, the LORD (SLIDE) made a way for your ancestors by creating dry land in the middle of the mighty waters. Yahweh destroyed Israel's enemies in pursuit of them by bringing the mighty waters back over the dry land.

That is always God's game plan. Make a way. Destroy the enemy. That is the story. We are captives. God devises an escape route. God destroys the enemies who are in hot pursuit. God makes a way. God defeats the enemies we flee.

But, now, the people say, what about us? Here we are, stuck in Babylon. In other words, 'God, what have you done for me lately?' So, now God is going to speak, and he isn't going to yell at us for asking such a foolish question.

No, what God says is (43:18-19): "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?"

This is God's story, and while God never changes, and while God is always faithful, while God end game is always the same (getting us home), the way God makes is adapted to our needs in our time. It is true that 'thou changest not, thy compassions they fail not', but it is also true that God is constantly creating a new way home for God's people. God is always making a new way, devising a new escape route.

"See, I am doing a new thing!" Are you looking, friends? Are you looking at what is the new way God is making for your lives, or have you become so used to feeling like you are a captive, stuck, that you cannot believe there is really a way out for you? "Forget the former things!", God says. You know how I made dry land through mighty waters? Well, 'you ain't seen nothing yet!'

(SLIDE) No, now YAHWEH will make a way through the desert by creating streams in a dry land. You won't die in the desert on your wilderness journey home because Yahweh is providing drink for thirsty people, and for the animals with which we share creation's space. God isn't going to bring you out of Babylon to let you die in the desert. God is going to raise up springs of wilderness water, which is no less miraculous but a lot more timely than creating dry land through a sea.

God knows our situations, and our creative God makes a way that fits what we need today. This is true for you as individuals, but also of us as a community. Eleven of us spent ten hours this weekend trying to perceive what this new thing is that God is doing at Hope Church. And nearly 70 of you, which is double what we had as a goal (!), spent a lot of time answering a survey which we studied this weekend. I know the survey was frustrating in lots of ways, but thank you for sticking with it. Here is what we learned this weekend with our consultant.

The survey is 'one of the most widely-researched studies in the history of surveys'. It measures the perceived reality for seven ministry areas, identifying areas we can celebrate and grow and areas we need to calibrate for the future success of the church.

We were told, "The survey is statistically-significant in showing that people like it here. The (survey company) observed that these were rock solid numbers we could rely on."

We identified 7 things we could celebrate from the surveys:

Worship; Prayer; Leadership; Missions; Christ; Welcome; Service

We also identified areas we need to calibrate: Communication of our message to the community and resource development, in terms of development of our present and future leaders.



We go forward asking two questions of our recommendations in the area of Pastoral Succession, Outreach and Discipleship:

1. How is every ministry plan of our church becoming communications savvy?
2. How does every ministry of our church develop leadership mentors?

We are meeting again on May 6 to continue the work of developing recommendations which will be presented to the Consistory in October and the Congregation in November for a vote in December.

But, just as we seek God's way forward for Hope Church, God calls you to invest time and energy in seeing what God is doing in your life. Are you willing to invest ten hours in prayer and Bible study and conversation with Christian friends trying to perceive God's way for you?

The first thing you need to decide is this: where are you trying to get now? Are you willing to leave your Babylon, your place of captivity which may have

become comfortable by its familiar feel, to go home? (SLIDE) What I would like you to do this week is to name the home which is your hope at the end of your journey through the wilderness. I am not talking about 'heaven' now, although that is the ultimate 'home'. But, what is the place, physically, relationally, or spiritually or emotionally that you want to get to, but you just seem unable to get there? Name that home. Put your hope in getting there and call on God to make a way for you, starting today. See, God is doing a new thing! Do you not perceive it?

If not, are you looking? Are you listening?

The Bible teaches a story, the story of our journey from captivity, through the wilderness, back to a land we will call home.

But this is not just our story. It is first and always God's story. It is a love story. And who doesn't love a love story with a happy ending, when the lovers are re-united? God loves those endings too.

Praise God! (43:21) God, your help in ages past is your hope for years to come.

Do you see it! God who made a way is still making a way. For you.

God is still writing your story.