



1616 W. Mequon Road, Mequon WI 53092  
(262)241-3121 [www.stjohnsmequon.org](http://www.stjohnsmequon.org)  
Email: [office@stjohnsmequon.org](mailto:office@stjohnsmequon.org)  
**Pastor James Tiefel**  
**(262) 853-9723 (cell#)**  
Email: [pastortiefel@gmail.com](mailto:pastortiefel@gmail.com)

---

## The Fifth Sunday in Lent

April 3, 2022

### Against the Rock of Christ's Exaltation, Rejection is Crushed

So what do we think of Jesus? We see him as Savior and Lord who rescued us from sin and death. We're in the minority, of course. The experts, if they believe he existed at all, view him as little more than a local folk hero who led a life of kindness that ended in death. The experts of Jesus' day felt the same. But Jesus took them on and forecast that their rejection would end in horrible punishment. We stand by; we listen and learn. When the risen Christ returns in glory the rejectors will regret their rejection—and we will reign with Christ in glory.

#### Isaiah 43:16-21

**This is what the LORD says—he who made a way through the sea, a path through the mighty waters, who 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: “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, the people I formed for myself that they may proclaim my praise.**

#### We Are on the Way

Have you ever driven through small towns and noticed a welcome sign that goes something like this: Welcome to Podunk, Minnesota. Population 300. Home of the State High School men's track 100-yard dash champion 2007. It's 2022 and the most significant thing about this town is that, at one point in the past 20 years, 1 high school student placed in the state track meet. And they keep the sign up to let everyone know, 20 years ago, something exciting to us happened here.

It isn't just with small towns, though. All of us are proud of things that happened in the past, sometimes even far in the past. And these accomplishments or achievements are not bad to remember, but it does make you wonder: Are we sometimes stuck in the past? Are we fixated on the things in the past to the point where it is hard to look forward? Again, there is nothing wrong with being proud of something that happened in the past, everything that we can be proud of happened in the past, but sometimes I wonder how many of those things in my past I let become defining traits that I won't be able to let go of, even if I really should.

The audience that Isaiah was writing to struggled with the same thing. The Exodus was *the key feature* of the Israelite nation. At the time of the Exodus from Egypt, when Moses led the nation through the Red Sea, the world knew of God's power. 40 years after the event, Rahab recalled what the Lord had done for the Israelites in the Exodus and so she protected the Israelite spies in Jericho. She recognized that the God who was behind the Exodus was not a God to trifle with. Rahab is in Jesus' family tree because she trusted in the God of the Exodus. But by the time Isaiah was writing to the Israelites, that event was many hundreds of years in the past. The people of Judah and Jerusalem had become so fixated on the event that was so far in the past that they thought no nation would ever defeat them, that their place in the world was fixed for eternity. What they failed to notice, though, were the hundreds of years of warnings. Their prosperity in the land was connected to their faithfulness to God. God would preserve them if they remained faithful to

him, but they didn't. God sent prophet after prophet and disaster after disaster to bring them back, but they continued to worship other gods and profane the one true God. They failed to listen to the warnings of the prophets to repent, and so God took their land away. He sent foreign armies to crush the nation of Israel and to carry a remnant into captivity. This is the audience that Isaiah was writing to: the remnant of Israelites who were living in a foreign land under a foreign king asking themselves, "What happened? I thought that God would preserve us forever?" These verses, and this entire portion of the book of Isaiah, are what Isaiah had to say to the remnant.

Our verses begin by invoking the name of the Lord, then reminding the people of which God he was talking about. This is not any pagan god, this is the Lord, the one who brought the Israelites out of Egypt, the one who was powerful enough to part a sea and crush one of the strongest armies in the world. This was the God who delivered his people from Egypt.

But forget about the Exodus, God said. That was old news. Yes, important. Yes, powerful, but he was going to do something different, now, something new. "Do you not perceive it?" God asks them. God was already putting into motion this new plan, but it was also an old plan. This was the plan that started in Eden. This was the plan that God carried through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This was the plan that God gave to David. This was the plan to fix what was wrong. This new thing would be carving a path through the wilderness, bringing water into the desert to give his people something to drink.

Maybe the people had hoped that God would repeat the Exodus, that he would deliver them from the hands of their oppressors like he had from the Egyptians. Maybe they hoped that this plan would include another act of power. This was the same God, but this was not going to be the same act, it was going to be different. God would bring his remnant back to Jerusalem, but it would be quite boring in contrast to the Exodus. God provided them Cyrus, a Persian king, who would send the Israelites back. No crazy escape, no plagues, no miraculous defeat of any army. Cyrus gave the people his blessing to go back to Jerusalem. He gave them his protection and even gave them resources to rebuild.

So, what could this new act be? We read about it in the Gospel for today as well. Jesus' parable of the vineyard has tenants who are abusing the master's generosity and the messengers of the master, so the master sends his own son. This was God's great plan. For those who believe, it is more spectacular than anything God had done before. God was made man in Jesus. The God-Man Jesus was born and lived and died for the sins of the world. But for those who reject Jesus, this doesn't even seem possible, let alone spectacular because Jesus, to them, is just a man. And yet it is Christ's work, his perfect life and innocent death which would ultimately address the true root of every problem: sin. By Christ's work, there is a clear path to heaven. No more are we enemies of God, unable to reach him, but we are on the way, the way to heaven, to eternal life with our heavenly father and with our brothers and sisters in Jesus.

The result in Isaiah's prophecy was that even the wild animals would praise God. But it wasn't their praise that God was after. The Lord said, "I provide water in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland, to give drink to my people, my chosen, <sup>24</sup>the people I formed for myself *that they may proclaim my praise.*" He did all this so that we would praise him. The wild animals know to praise him, even, so how much more should we, the true beneficiaries of God's great work, be praising God!

Is that our default? Is our default to recognize the water that God has provided for us that we didn't know we needed, the path to heaven that we didn't know existed and to praise him for it? Much like those in exile, the remnant, we dwell on the past. We think about the blessings that we had, about "the good old days." How often are we frustrated by the plans that we make that always seem to come to nothing? How often do we fail to give God the praise that he deserves because we get so fixated on the things of the world? This is the sad state that we all too often find ourselves in. Disgruntled like the Israelites in the wilderness, frustrated like the exiles in Babylon. All we want is what we don't have and once we get it, it isn't enough. All too often, we consider the worldly blessings a result of our own work, what we deserve and pay no attention to the most significant blessing, the fact that Christ has given us a path to heaven and placed us on that path! It seems all too easy to consider what we have on earth, or don't have, and forget that we are on our way to eternal glory with God. It is too easy for us to not praise God, and so often we don't.

God saw that we were not giving him his due praise, like in the parable Jesus told. We were not treating our blessings, as blessings. So, God did what he had to do and he sent us his beloved Son, the Son who would clear a path for us, who carved the way to heaven. It was not what we were expecting, but what we needed. Like the Samaritan woman at the well, Jesus came to offer us the water of life that flows forever, the stream from which God gives his people water that they will never thirst again. The Lord desires our praise and by Christ's sacrifice on the cross, that is just what he gets. Christ glorified God by sacrificing himself and doing his father's will. He gave God the praise that we so often fail to offer. And then, in the waters of our baptism, we are connected to Christ's death and resurrection. We are washed clean of our sin. We are set free from the bondage of sin and reminded of the amazing thing that God did for us! He made a way in the wilderness, he made streams flow in the desert. Where there was only death, now there is life. Where there was no way to heaven, now we are on the way!

Let us remember that as we praise God when we give thanks for all that he has given us, from the mundane to the spectacular. From the gifts of the past to the prosperity of the present to the blessed eternal life that he has waiting for us, bought and paid for by the blood of Christ. Let us give thanks to the Lord, from whom all blessings flow.

We praise God when we proclaim the marvelous things that he has done for us to anyone and everyone who will listen. In Isaiah's prophecy, the Lord reminds us that he made us to proclaim his praise. It is a reminder that as sinner-saints we need to hear. By Christ's gifts, we are empowered to praise him. To each other, to family and friends, to the world. Let the world know of this wonderful, new thing that God has done. 2,000 years old, sure, but his mercies are new every morning.

We praise him not to get to heaven, but because the way through the desert has already been made. Our thirst is quenched when we remember the water that flows from heaven and when we remember the baptism which connects us to Christ's work. Christ is the source of the river from which we drink, and whose water will never stop flowing.

The way we are on leads to heaven. God placed us on the way in Christ. To God be praise forevermore. Amen