

Isaiah 43:16-21

Isaiah is speaking here to a people who are in despair. They are in exile and feel like there is no hope for them. They do not think that they will ever make it out of this situation. To them, there is no future, there is no hope, there is nothing.

And yet, Isaiah reminds them of all that the Lord has done. Isaiah reminds them of the Exodus as God delivered the people from Egypt. As God made a way in the waters where there was none so that the people were able to escape to freedom.

Isaiah has the people recall on the past, recall all of the wonders of God and all that the Lord has done, but, he does not have them dwell on the past so that they can continue to live in it, cling to it, and idolize it.

Instead, he has them remember the past in a way that does not keep them stuck in the past but points them towards the future and all that the Lord is going to do.

Instead of dwelling in the past, he tells them to focus on the future because the Lord will do even greater things in the future.

The Lord tells Isaiah that God is about to do something new. The Lord will make a new way, a way in the wilderness, and all the people have to do is join God on the journey.

All they have to do is have faith and trust in the Lord that God is not done yet and that the best is not in the past but the best is yet to come.

It is the same for us as well.

We look back and revere all of the wonderful things that the Lord has done in both our lives and here at Edge but we cannot dwell and live in the past.

We look back to the past only so that we can be propelled forward as we move with faith and hope to the future that the Lord has for us.

As we continue our Lenten journey, we are reminded to not dwell too much in the past and to not cling on too tightly to the past because it can cause us to stumble in our faith journey.

If we focus on what God did in the past, then it will be very difficult to see and to live into what God is doing with us right now.

In order to continue on our faith journey, we must acknowledge the past, revere it even in some ways, but then we must forget about it and be open to what the Holy Spirit is trying to do in our lives right now.

If I focused on my past, even if I just focused on where I was in my faith journey a few years ago, I would be unable to continue to grow each day. I would be stuck in the past while the present is passing me by and I would have no hope and no plan for the future.

But as Christians, we have hope for the future. We should always have hope for the future. Regardless of how the world may look, regardless of what the world may be telling us about the doom and gloom of today and tomorrow, we continue to have hope because we know the Lord is not done and that God is making and will continue making all things new.

God will make each of us new each day if we allow God to. God will work within our hearts, minds, and souls and will help us to grow in love; love of God and love of others. If we do not dwell too much in the past, if we do not live in the past, and if we allow the Holy Spirit to lead us and guide us, then the Lord will continue to make things new within each of us.

The same is true of the church as well. I am sure that many of you can remember what you may call the good old days here at Edge UMC. The days when the rooms were filled for Sunday School, the pews were filled during worship, and the Hill building was full of fellowship.

And I must admit that it is good to look back at the good days in the past. It is great to remember them, but it is not good to dwell in the past and to think that things will never be that good ever again.

Instead, as Christians, we know that the best is yet to come and we know the Lord is continuing to work and move within each of us, within our church, and within our community.

The church had some amazing days in the past but if we dwell on them and live in those days, then we will not be able to be a part of the even better days that the Lord has in store for us as a church.

If the Israelites in exile, that Isaiah is talking to in this morning's passage, had continued to live in the past and dwell there, then they would never have been able to see their future fulfilled as they returned from exile, rebuilt, and lived for the future with the hope of God.

If they would have dwelled in the past, then they would not have been able to continue on and they would have had no hope for the future. In fact, if they would have continued to dwell in the past and not move forward following God, we would have had no hope and no future.

If the people continued to look back at all that the Lord had done but think that the Lord could not do even greater things now, then they would have never made it back from exile and there would have never been born in Bethlehem the Messiah, the baby Jesus, who would grow up and save the entire world.

It is good to remember the past but it is not good to dwell in it and to continue to live it. If we do that then we could get in the way of the wonderful ways that the Holy Spirit is trying to work within each of us, within our community, and within our church.

As we continue on in this season of Lent, I want us all to remember the past and all that the Lord has done in our

lives and in the life of the church but I do not want us to dwell in the past. Instead, we should dwell in the present while being filled with hope for and preparing for our future.

As part of this inward and outward faith life evaluation that we are doing during Lent, I want to invite you all to read the book *Autopsy of a Deceased Church: 12 Ways to Keep Yours Alive* as we learn from churches that died and closed and learn from the mistakes that they made so that we can follow the Lord in transformation and revival.

This study will be difficult. It will require us to recall the past and then it will push us to not dwell in the past but to learn from the past so that we can be transformed by the past and continue on in our mission in the world to make disciples of Jesus Christ.

There will be times along the road with this study where you may get upset, sad, or angry and I want to invite you all to not hide that emotion but to allow it come out so that we can all participate fully in these discussions. To help with this, we have a box in the back where you can put in comments that crossed your mind while reading the book anonymously in case you would like to speak anonymously.

Even if you cannot make the Wednesday evening meeting time, I want to still invite you to join us in this journey. Still read the book, it is short, a quick and easy read with us only covering one chapter a week, and then I want you to

discuss it with others and with me. You could even send some notes and insights to someone that can read them out in our discussion.

I am willing to meet with anyone just about anytime in order to discuss this book whether one on one or in small groups so that we can all allow the Holy Spirit to stir within us and lead us forward into the revival that the Lord is starting here at Edge UMC.

God makes all things new and God is making things new in our lives and here at Edge UMC. It is important that we follow God and join God in this process of transformation and growth.

Let us remember the past but let us not dwell in it for, if we do, all we will do is get in the way of God making all things new.

Let us follow God and join the Holy Spirit in whatever lies ahead for us, the community, and the church.

Let us pray.