

“Fuhgeddaboutit”
Isaiah 65:17-25
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Can you imagine if there were NO yellow lights at traffic intersections?

No yellow lights - - only - - red lights and green lights.

Like the game we used to play in gym class: “red light green light”.

What would you do THEN - - if you were in the MIDDLE of the intersection and the light changed - - and there were NO yellow lights? / Would you turn back - - or speed up? / Or if you were approaching an intersection at 35 mph - - and then the light changed - - in an instant - - from red to green?

We all know what happens if we’re at a red light and it turns green and we DON’T step on it - - right? / Or if the person in front of you is looking down at their phone - - and just sits there...

A yellow light - - gives us a moment.

Time for - - transition.

Time to prepare for the NEW thing that is coming.

Time to adjust - - and deal with - - momentum.

Anyone remember the movie “Rainman” with Dustin Hoffman?

He plays an autistic man - - a genius - - who has trouble making decisions.

In the movie he has to deal with crosswalks.

Which do NOT have a yellow light.

It’s either “walk” or “don’t walk”.

So in the movie - - he would freeze - - right in the middle of the road - - if the light changed. / And he would stand there - - in the position of GREATEST danger.

Well - - sometimes life is like that - - and doesn't give us much time to adjust.

There are times when we feel like it's difficult to turn back.

Or something NEW is coming and we're not ready.

The new thing that is on the horizon might be - - GREAT - - or AWFUL - - either way - - there is some adjustment to do - - when things - - change.

We can be kind of - - stuck - - between remembering and moving ahead.

The prophet Isaiah - - in the Old Testament reading for today - - sets remembering the past - - next to hope for the future. / And Isaiah says, "the former things will NOT be remembered - - or come to mind" / And Isaiah says God is doing a NEW thing - - creating - - continually creating - - new possibilities...

This is the very END of the book of Isaiah.

So the people have returned from a long period of - - distress and exile - - a time of waiting and worrying - - a time of captivity and trial.

And NOW they are trying to make a fresh start.

And Isaiah says things will be different.

Different with houses - - and different with crops - - and with children.

The crying will stop - - and the rejoicing will begin.

But one of the - - complexities - - of the Bible reading is this:

It paints a picture of God as - - many things.

Not just ONE thing.

God is BOTH the creator - - AND the redeemer.

But - - unlike in some of our Christian creeds - - or our theological statements about Jesus - - here in the Old Testament - - God's creating work CONTINUES - - and GROWS out of - - God's REDEEMING work. / That's a switch - - a new and different picture of God. / It adds complexity - - to how we know God to be.

For the most part we have thought of God as creating - - FIRST.

God creates the world - - and us - - and waits for us to mess up.

Then God - - redeems us - - coming into creation in Jesus.

But it's different here. / In the Old Testament story - - God REDEEMS FIRST.

God redeems Israel - - saves them from slavery - - and is with them in exile.

And NOW at the END of that story - - as they RETURN from exile - -

REDEEMED - - and hopeful about the future - - Isaiah says NOW God creates. / Or God continues to create.

The sentence in Hebrew is in the PRESENT tense.

"I create" - - it's three times in the present tense.

God is creator AND redeemer.

And the FUTURE - - just like God - - is many things.

The future is CREATED - - and this means something for our grief - - and our lifespan - - and our crops - - and our children - - and our houses - - and our sins.

SO God is many things.

AND the future for US - - is many things.

And the past...?

Fuhgeddaboutit!

Anyone remember Johnny Depp in Donnie Brasco?

That seems to be when that phrase became popular.

“Fuhgeddaboutit” has a lot of meanings.

To quote Johnny Depp - - well to SORT OF quote him - - the edited version:

“Fuhgeddaboutit is like - - if you AGREE with someone, like they say “Raquel Welch is beautiful” - - you reply “fuhgeddaboutit”. / BUT then if you DISAGREE, like a Lincoln is better than a Cadillac? Fuhgeddaboutit. You know?

But then it’s also like if something is the greatest thing ever: fuhgeddaboutit

But it’s also like - - a response to an insult: fuhgeddaboutit”

So God - - like that phrase - - God - - is complicated.

The former things will not be remembered - - forgotten - - says Isaiah.

The future will be better - - says Isaiah - - to the people of Israel.

But then he reminds them of all the ways they have been hurt in the past.

And describes God - - continuing to CREATE - - and redeem.

I was thinking about all this - - and about how it might work in MY life - - and I remembered TWO things: My aunt Gladys - - and a girl named Melissa.

Gladys was actually a dear friend of our family - - who married my great uncle. So technically she was not my aunt - - but instead it was complicated - - like so many things. / And in order to simplify it for us kids - - we called her “aunt Gladys”.

Whenever we went to her apartment - - she would give us something that belonged to her. / It was never a gift that was purchased new. / But it was new to us.

It was like she was giving us a part of herself.

A piece of chipped glass - - a tiny scissors - - a stitched pillow case.

These were parts of Gladys - - and her PAST - - her MEMORIES.

BUT - - WE didn't have HER memories - - WE just had - - her.

And so to us - - they were parts of her - - and were fascinating - - and NEW.

And those things will always remind me - - now - - who she was.

And maybe more importantly - - who I am.

I am someone who - - belonged to Gladys - - even more than her belongings.

So should I remember her - - and look back?

Or should I charge ahead into the future?

Neither.

The question is how will I BE - - who I AM - - NOW.

AND how will I TRANSITION - - and use the YELLOW LIGHTS - - in life?

Maybe I will do a NEW thing - - and live it differently than my elders.

I will leave some of the mistakes and painful things from my past behind.

Hopefully I will.

And I will let God continue to create - - and redeem.

Standing there in the intersections of life can be scary.

In between red and green - - staring at the yellow light.

It reminds me of a story about a little boy who was trying to memorize a Bible verse to recite in church. / The phrase was from Matthew 14, when Peter is trying to TRUST Jesus - - in the storm. / Jesus says, "It is I, have NO fear".

So the boy said it over and over all week: It is I, have no fear...

But he was nervous about speaking in front of people.

He got up in front of everyone and saw their eyes looking expectantly at him.

And he said: "It's ME - - and I'm scared to death!"

Part of what I hear in the Old Testament reading this morning is a reassurance - - that we do NOT have to be AFRAID.

God created - - and God continues to create.

But God's creation is ROOTED - - in REDEMPTION.

God REDEEMS Israel - - and THEN continues to create new things in them.

It's who God IS.

Which brings me to my second story - - about a girl named Melissa.

I was in my 20s and in my first church as pastor.

So I was sometimes - - doing it for the first time - - and doing it scared - - like the little boy I told the story about - - a minute ago. / Anyway - - there was a young girl whose family were members of this church in Pennsylvania.

Melissa had a form of cancer called leukemia.

Melissa was 8 years old.

And she was not healed in body - - but rather she died.

I had been to see her in the hospital - - and was going down the elevator to get in my car - - and before I got home the call came that she had died.

But what she did for that church - - was a healing.

People had rallied around her - - and prayed and raised money for the family. We listened to her words - - and were inspired by her spirit. / She remained stronger and higher and more courageous than any of us.

And her illness called us to prayer - - and strengthened our connections to one another - - and maybe helped us face our own fears.

She certainly helped me face my fear.

So I am left with the impression that her illness - - helped HEAL us.

She did not remember the former things.

Forget about that.

God was doing a new thing.

Can a disease - - help heal our world? Yes.

In God's great redemptive mercy - - yes.

That's what we are a part of when we give to the stewardship campaign - - or attend worship - - and give our time to this community. / We are a part of what God is doing - - and WE are trying to create too! / We're creating a community of compassion.

As I read Isaiah - - and think about Melissa - - and HOPE about the future of Plymouth church - - and LOOK AHEAD to next year - - - this comes to me - - kind of like a word from God. / So Imagine God speaking to us, and saying:

Settle down - - in your life.

Settle down into this community of faith - - and live here.

Make a home in your struggles - - and in your joys.

Trust me to keep creating - - and redeeming.

I create!

I create...