



## Kirknewton and East Calder Parish Church of Scotland

Minister: Rev Dr André J Groenewald

8 Manse Court, East Calder, Livingston, EH53 0HF

Tel: 01506 884585, Mob: 075 888 458 14, email: groenstes@yahoo.com

[www.knec4jesus.org.uk](http://www.knec4jesus.org.uk)



**Reading:**                    **Isaiah 43: 14-21**

### **Sermon: 21 March 2010**

#### **Text verses for the sermon**

<sup>18</sup> "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. <sup>19</sup> See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland.

#### **Sermon**

If there is one thing we do not like doing at all, then it is to forget old differences and fights, and focus on the present whilst looking forward into the future. It seems that whenever a dispute occurs between couples, the past is always right at hand to ignite the fire! It also occurs when we argue with our children or grandchildren, our brothers and sisters, even with our friends. We are renowned for embracing the past like we would hold a wean. We often refer to the past whenever the situation arises without taking into consideration that times have moved on. But it seems as if we can't stop using the past as a stick to hurt and hit people.

Others are so caught up by their past, that they can't live in the present or see a future. We hear it so many times in the stories of people that suffered abuse or addiction. We read it in the tragic letters of people who commit suicide. More and more children fall victim of neglect which will scar them for the rest of their lives. I am sure there are even people sitting in this church this morning that would want to deny some events that happened in their past.

How do we forget the former things, and realise the reality of the present whilst looking at the future? The answer is that we must trust God with our past, present and future realities like Judah once did. We must ask God to help us as the Judeans did - to find meaning in our past, so that it can shape our present and direct us towards the future that He made possible for us!

Our reading reflects a very dark period in the history of the southern kingdom Judah namely their exile in the foreign country of Babylonia or Chaldea. It all happened in the years from 597 to 581 when the Chaldeans exiled the Judeans to Babylonia.

They left only a small part of the population which consisted mostly of the poorest of the poor. All the rest were captives. It all happened because they did not listen to the Lord their God's appeal and obeyed His commandments. They were untruthful to him and did not serve him in the way He expected them to serve him. They followed the idols and listened to these false gods and forgot about their real God, the God they made a covenant with! Yes they deserted their real God for the false and fake gods of their world. They did not listen to his warnings even after He told them what will be happening to them. They totally forgot about their past and how truthful and loyal and loving God has been. They totally lost sight of God's present warnings and as a consequence had no future to hold on to.

But now they are in exile. Some wanted to stay in Babylonia, while others only wanted to go back to Jerusalem. They had no future perspective of what their future would bring. They had no hope and were like people without any direction!

Then in our reading the prophet Isaiah tells them that the Lord God will forgive them and give them a new future. He will demonstrate his sovereignty by overthrowing the Chaldean Empire and bringing them back to their home country Judah. He will destroy the mighty power of the Chaldeans. He will help them even as they go through the Syrian Desert and provide in their every need like providing water to help them reduce/quench their thirst. Even the desert animals honour him for that! But they must repent. They must part with their sinful ways!

I do not think the Judeans were really very hopeful that they would return to their homeland. I think they were pretty sure that it would never ever happen. The Babylonians after all were a world power to be reckoned with.

Well, we can most certainly see in the events of history that it all happened just as God promised them. In the year 539 Cyrus of Persia overpowered Babylonia and allowed the Judeans to return to their homeland. He also helped them to rebuild their temple in Jerusalem.

So what does the text say to us this morning?

Well, we can most certainly see that God was true to his Word. But he did not only give them water in the desert, He provided for us as well. He gave us the living water in Jesus Christ. He gave us an oasis in our deserts of despair, pain, and suffering. He changed our futures and shaped our present realities. He wiped out all our sins and transgressions. He gave us a new past, present and future in Jesus Christ and provides daily through his Holy Spirit.

Easter is all about God who changed our lives forever. It is about his Almighty power which could allow streams of grace to flow over us as sinful beings. It is about God who allowed a cross to be erected in the wasteland to save us from death, hell, and sin.

Yes, God forgot all our former sins and gave us the opportunity to live in the present with renewed faith, love, and hope. He made it possible for you and me to break with our sinful pasts and live a meaningful life in the present. He gave us the means to love Him, ourselves, and our neighbours. He gave us direction towards a new future.

So I guess this Easter we have to focus on the promises of God. If there is an event in our lives that hinders us to live in a relationship with God, if it is in our past or in our present, then we must ask God to help us to break free from it. If there is something that makes us feel guilty or ashamed, we must go to God and ask his forgiveness that we can serve Him in the present with joy whilst acknowledging what he has done in the past. And we must make sure that people trust us so that we can help them to deal with their past or their present realities in order for them to see God as their only saviour and help!

I am not saying that the past does not exist. The past is important in so far it shapes the present and our future. Lessons need to be learned but also reviewed in the light of and in the context of the present and future. If we do not live in the present and only dwell in the past, we would soon find ourselves as passengers on a flight to nowhere. We do not only find warnings of the consequences of such an attitude in the bible like we read this morning. We even find it in the national “anthem” of Scotland, when we sing: “Those

days are passed now and in the past they must remain but we can still rise now, and be the nation again”.

Why is it so important that we take what is good from the past, focus on the present whilst looking at the future? Well, if we do not know our past, and God’s working in it, how will we know or understand God’s dealings with us in the present or the future. We cannot:

- ONLY live in the past,
- or ONLY in the present with no sense of tomorrow,
- or ONLY in the future with no sense of the past or the present.

Maybe the time has come for us as followers of Christ to show the world in the present reality that God changed our pasts from despair into having a future with hope! May the world see in our actions that God has wiped away our sins by:

- not judging others;
- by loving the most despised person in or community;
- by deeds of forgiveness;
- by helping those with a terrible past to find meaning in the present with God’s help;
- by proclaiming the Good news that God has indeed given us in Christ a new way of living.

Amen