

Declaring New Things

Isaiah 42:1-9

INTRODUCTION

"The Wonder Years" was a TV drama that ran from 1988-1993. The series depicted the social and family life of a boy in a typical American suburban middle-class family. The boy's name was Kevin Arnold, portrayed by Fred Savage. Kevin was the son of Jack and Norma Arnold. Kevin's father held a management job for defense contractor while his mother was a housewife. Kevin had an older brother named Wayne and an older sister, Karen. Each episode in the series was told through Kevin's reflections as an adult in his mid-30s.

One of the key taglines for the series was this:

Growing up happens in a heartbeat. One day you're in diapers; the next day you're gone. (The Wonder Years, Drama series, 1988)

Or so it seems. Time flies. We have all experienced that feeling, haven't we?

- I experience it every time I spend an afternoon with my grandchildren. What happened to those babies I used to hold?

Well, time certainly seems to have flown by in the Gospel story.

- Just two weeks ago – December 25th – we celebrated the birth of Jesus. Now today – just two weeks later – Jesus is being baptized.
- He is 30 years old and His baptism signals the beginning of His earthly ministry.
- In the span of 14 days – from Christmas Sunday to January 8 – we have fast-forwarded 30 years! Gone from manger to ministry!
- Now, truthfully, there is an important lesson to learn in that fast leap from birth to adulthood.
 - It is not the intent of the Gospels to tell us anything about the "wonder years" of Jesus' childhood. And for the most part, they don't spend any time on it.
 - We know that he was dedicated in the Temple when he was eight days old, in keeping with the Law.
 - We know that at age 12 He was debating theology with the scholars of the day during an annual trip to Jerusalem.
 - But in the Bible we have no other information about those 30 "wonder years."
- It is, however, the purpose of the Gospels to:
 - Present the unique story of Jesus' birth so that we become convinced that He is the divine Son of God
 - Tell us the message of the crucifixion so that we become convinced that He has come to bring salvation to all who will believe.

Those two truths are summarized in that most famous of all verses:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

There it is. The gospel in a nutshell. Jesus is the Son of God and He died so that you could live.

The span of time that covered the last 30 years and that we experience as a time-flying moment of two week was all preparation for the events of today's Gospel text.

When Jesus stepped out of the water that day, everything changed. It was a new day, a new beginning.

Over 700 years before that baptismal moment, the prophet Isaiah spoke to the people of God about this new beginning.

- The people of Isaiah's day were trapped in captivity to foreign powers.
- Isaiah told them of a coming day when God's chosen one would come to set all people free from the things that held them captive – no matter what that might be.

... to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness. (Isaiah 42:7).

And two verses later God adds:

See, the former things have taken place, and new things I declare; before they spring into being I announce them to you. (Isaiah 42:9)

And with the baptism of Jesus, that day has arrived.

So what's new? What new things can be declared because Jesus has gone from being a baby in a manger to a fully baptized itinerant preacher?

DECLARATION #1: MY PAST IS IN THE PAST

Isaiah said it like this:

... the former things have taken place ... (Isaiah 42:9)

They happened. I can't change them. But they are now "former."

In the book "A Forgiving God in an Unforgiving World," Ron Lee Davis retells the true story of a priest in the Philippines, a much-loved man of God who carried the burden of a secret sin he had committed many years before. He had repented but still had no peace, no sense of God's forgiveness.

In his parish was a woman who deeply loved God and who claimed to have visions in which she spoke with Christ and he with her. The priest, however, was

skeptical. To test her he said, "The next time you speak with Christ, I want you to ask him what sin your priest committed while he was in seminary." The woman agreed.

A few days later the priest asked, "Well, did Christ visit you in your dreams?"

"Yes, he did," she replied.

"And did you ask him what sin I committed in seminary?"

"Yes."

"Well, what did he say?"

"He said, 'I don't remember.'"

Isaiah's message was delivered to a people who had committed every possible sin against the God who loved them. They were currently being held in captivity because of those sins. But the message of God through Isaiah was this:

... the former things have taken place ... (Isaiah 42:9)

Those are former things. And you can't erase them, but they can be forgiven. Your past can truly be in the past. That's good news!

DECLARATION #2: ALL THINGS ARE NEW

Here's even better news:

... new things I declare ... (Isaiah 42:9)

When God spoke through Isaiah to those people held in captivity, He told them about a future event

... new things I declare; before they spring into being I announce them to you.
(Isaiah 42:9)

That future event is here. As Jesus stepped out of the water, the final part of God's plan for our salvation was launched. All things were becoming new.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

One day a traveling evangelist preached a sermon on what it meant to be a new creation in Jesus Christ. In the congregation that day was a young woman whose heart was heavy with a load of guilt and shame. After he had finished preaching, a few moments had passed by and everyone had left the auditorium – everyone except for this young woman.

She came up to the evangelist and thanked him for an enjoyable service. But, she added, "I don't think your sermon was really true for me. You don't know my past. I am one of those people God could never forgive." And she proceeded to tell her story.

"When I was a little girl, I believed in Jesus and tried to follow Him. But my home life was such a mess. As a child my father was an alcoholic and stayed drunk most of

the time. He repeatedly told me that I was ugly. My mother always told me that I was worthless and would never amount to anything.

When I became a teenager I met a guy that told me I was special. I had never heard anyone say words like that before. And so in my ignorance I gave him everything. Two months later when he found out I was going to have a baby, he left me and I have never seen him since. I could not go to my mother or father, so I went to a health clinic and did away with my child. And now even though it has been many years ago, I still feel so guilty and dirty over what I had done. I realize my parents were right. I'm ugly and worthless. So you see Preacher, your sermon wasn't really something for me."

With tears streaming down his face, the preacher began to tell this young woman again about all that Jesus had done for her. And after a while they prayed together. And when the prayer was over, a smile came on her face. "It was amazing," she said, "I feel different somehow."

She was different. She was new.

APPLICATION

And it is all because of Jesus. Born two weeks ago. Baptized today. Soon to be crucified, buried, and resurrected. Time flies.

This day marks a new start in the salvation story. God declares a new thing is now happening.

- As this New Year begins, I can't think of a more appropriate time than right now for us to start anew in our walk of faith.
- The past is in the past. All things are becoming new.

Amen.