

*I had a friend was a big baseball player
back in high school
He could throw that speedball by you
Make you look like a fool boy
Saw him the other night at this roadside bar
I was walking in, he was walking out
We went back inside sat down had a few drinks
but all he kept talking about was*

*Glory days well they'll pass you by
Glory days in the wink of a young girl's eye
Glory days, glory days*

Even for those of you who don't recognize the words of that great American theologian, Bruce Springsteen, I bet you understand what he's talking about. It's a sad state of affairs when someone reaches middle age but is still living in the past.

Sometimes we can get ourselves stuck in a moment (to quote another songwriter-theologian). Sometimes we can get ourselves stuck in a grief or loss and it wears us down. We can't move on and we can't let it go because the pain is too great. But we can also get ourselves stuck in moments that were quite profound and happy and positive. It's cool to be a star athlete in high school; and it only becomes sad when you are getting ready for your twenty-fifth high school reunion and are still wearing your high school colors down at the local bar. Life is like a river; and rivers are about change.

Two of the voices that speak to us today from Holy Scripture are talking about letting go and moving on—not from tragedy or loss but from the temptation to nostalgia. The prophet Isaiah worries that the “glory days” of the Exodus, when God “made a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters” are keeping the people of his day from noticing what God is up to in a new era. Certainly God *was* present on that day when the chariots and horses and riders of Pharaoh's army drowned in the Red Sea and Miriam led the Israelites in song: “free at least, free at last, thank God almighty we are free at last!” The Exodus was an amazing and extraordinary event. But it happened a long time ago. And it's possible to get so caught up in Exodus talk that you will miss the new thing God is doing.

It happens to individuals like the guy in Bruce's song; it happens in families, congregations, communities and nations. Where are the leaders we had back in the latter part of the eighteenth century, we sometimes ask? How come we don't get leaders like Washington and Jefferson and Lincoln anymore? Where are the pastors like the pastors of old? How come kids today don't appreciate things the way that those who lived through the Great Depression did?

Sometimes our questions are fair. But more often we have done some revisionism, intentionally or not. I've become something of a buff over the past decade or so in reading about the founding fathers and I'll tell you this: while there is no doubt that they were a great generation, they were also quite human and we do them and ourselves a disservice when we forget that it was not easy. Before they had memorials on the lawn in Washington, DC, Washington and Jefferson (not to mention Adams and Madison) all had their foibles, all played petty politics, all let personal agendas

sometimes get in the way of making good public policy. That isn't to say that they didn't on occasion rise above all of that; nor to in any way diminish their greatness. It is simply to say that nostalgia is a funny thing and the good old days weren't always experienced that way at the time and there is no school where anyone ever had to walk up hill both ways to get there.

These are the good old days. Or at least, with God's help, they have the potential to be. These are the days that God is at work in our lives, our families, our community and our nation. So the prophet Isaiah says something very strong: he tells people whose whole faith is built on the Exodus: forget about it.

Why would he say that? I think it's because if you are only looking to see what God did "once upon a time" then you are in danger of missing what God is doing right now. And in fact, Isaiah says, even now, God is about to do a new thing. And you will not be able to perceive it if you are looking back. It is right before your eyes if you will only look: but to see it you have to pay attention to this moment, to this time, to this place. And if you turn around and look back to the Exodus then you will not see what is happening right now.

St. Paul says something of the same thing as he thinks back on his old life as a respected Pharisee. In his own inimitable way, Paul says to his brothers and sisters in Philippi: "look, if anyone had reason to brag it was me:

- circumcised on the eighth day
- a member of the people of Israel
- of the tribe of Benjamin; a Hebrew born of Hebrews
- as to the law, a Pharisee
- as to zeal, a persecutor of the church
- as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

But Paul, too, says, "forget about it." It is rubbish compared to what I'm moving towards. I know I'm not there yet, Paul says. But I know what I'm striving towards and "forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus."

Forgetting what lies behind us—not just the crappy stuff but the glory days—to strain forward, to press on to what lies ahead. Isaiah and Paul and Bruce all agree that sitting around and talking about "glory days"—even God's glory days—gets boring pretty fast. The challenge of faith is to open our eyes to see God's hand at work in the world around us. Sometimes we need to forget some things, let some things go, not just the difficult stuff we want to let go but the really great stuff that we think defines who we are, so that we can become the new creation God yearns for us to be.

Today's collect reminds us that we live in the midst of "swift and varied changes" of the world. As if we didn't all know that before we came here today! Time passes by very quickly and it's really easy to understand how we can try to hold onto the anchor of good and happy memories of a better time and place. But we cannot go back in time, so if our better time and place is in the past, we are certain to miss what God is doing right now in our lives and our world. And so we prayed that "our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found." Where is that? Where can we fix

our hearts in a world where time is an ever-flowing stream? The answer, of course, is to fix our hearts on God.

Today we will offer prayers for healing. This always merits a few words of explanation. Sometimes we pray really hard for God to heal us, or more often, someone for whom we care very deeply. We pray for God to heal our friend of cancer or heart disease or alcoholism. And sometimes people are healed in exactly the ways we prayed for. Miracles do happen, even today and they very often defy explanation. While modern medicine may well be a part of the cure there are also those times when the health professionals are left scratching their heads; they cannot explain what has happened but it's good. I hear these stories in my line of work and I hope you all do too.

But there are no guarantees. Sometimes it appears to us as if God was not listening. The person we loved dies, as we all will one day die. God doesn't heal everyone, at least not in the ways we had hoped God would. And there is no doubt that the great mystery of death and dying causes many people to question and even lose their faith.

Many who may wish to come forward today for prayers will want to be healed physically, or want to ask that someone they love be healed physically. And that is part of what we do in this place and it is perfectly appropriate to ask for God to heal those whom we love in these ways. But prayer isn't magic; and ultimately the only prayer that we can be certain will be answered every time is the one that Jesus taught us in Gethsemane: "not my will, Oh Lord, but thine be done."

But our prayers for healing are not limited to physical healing for individuals. We can pray for spiritual healing for ourselves and others, especially if we find ourselves stuck in the past. We can pray for open eyes and ears to see God at work in the world around us; to help us to remember where to look. We can pray for emotional healing for ourselves and for those whom we have hurt, and those who have hurt us. We can pray for healing in our families, that the hearts of parents would be turned to their children and the hearts of children to their parents. We can pray for social and political healing in Washington, DC; because whatever good they did or didn't do, Washington and Adams and Jefferson and Hamilton are still dead last time I checked. So if there is to be peace and justice in our time, then we will need statesmen to lead us away from fear and toward a still more perfect union.

And in all of these prayers—personal and social, physical, spiritual, and psychological—we may well hear the voice of God saying, "you are healed; now go and help to heal. Be at peace; now go and be a peacemaker. You are forgiven; now go and forgive. You are reconciled to God and neighbor; now go and be an ambassador of reconciliation."

Do not consider the former things—the glory days of a distant or recent past. Set your hearts and minds on God today as we press on toward the heavenly call of God in Jesus Christ. Amen.