

Are you a FOMO OR FLOP Christian?

(Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) or Fear of Losing our Past (FLOP))

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Isaiah 43:16-21

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Let us pray:

Gracious God, how powerful is your word. It challenges us to look deep inside ourselves. It seduces us to invite you in and to allow you to minister to our needs. For our needs are great, even if it is difficult for us to sometimes admit that. Lead us in surprising ways. Help us see you will for us at this time and beyond. We ask these things in Jesus name. Amen.

Last Sunday evening, I sat in a coffee shop, and between reading the Sunday paper and drinking my skinny latte, I observed how three people sitting across from me interacted. All three had phones in hand at all times. Most of the time were not looking at each other, other than to show each the messages and pictures that they were receiving on their phone.

And, I asked myself, what would it mean for some of us not to have phones that keep us connected at all times? Are we suffering from the fear of missing out?

Research shows that 50 percent of teens and young adults become anxious when they cannot check their tech devices as often as they would like. Further research shows that they check their messages every 15 minutes or less.

I later learned that Fear of Missing Out is a phenomenon that is alive and well in our culture. It is surprising to learn that the prophet Isaiah had FOMO as well. He feared that Israel was going to miss out on the “*New Thing*” God was doing.

When we think about prophets, we feel a bit suspicious. I think that we have had our share in our lifetime of “so-called” prophets that have told the world exactly when the world is going to end. Later, we find out that these prophecies are not true. But, I personally do not put much weight in prophets who will come to alert me about things that are out of my control. I believe that all of us in this world are thirsty for a word of hope ~ “*esperanza*” ~ a word that could help us go through the difficulties ahead.

The prophet Isaiah brings a message of great hope at a time when the people of Israel were in exile in Babylon. This exile was not one where the people had to make bricks (with or without straw); there were no prison walls or whips. This exile was different. It was one that was designed to strip the people of Israel from their dignity and their values.

Walter Bruggeman describes this exile in Babylon as a sever displacement, alienation “from the place that gave identity and security...[and] the shapes and forms that gave power to faith and live.”¹

When the Babylonians eradicated people, they did not concentrate just in defeating them, but they carried off the “flower” of the nation, including the artist, the poets, the voices that were strong within the people. Their strategy was to destroy the people’s vision, dreams, and aspirations.

How many times, have we ourselves felt like we have been stripped of our voice, our dreams, and our identity? How many times have we experienced communal displacement, not physical removal, but by circumstances that have left us wondering, now, who are we and where shall we go?

It was in this scenario that the prophet Isaiah springs up with a strong voice to say that God was doing a new thing. And, he basically says -- how great are the things that God has done in the past! What God is about to do is even greater!

The prophet Isaiah has FOMO (fear of missing out) and is inviting the whole people of Israel to have that as well. He does not want to miss what God is going to do next. He wants to be part of it and he is telling everyone that they should look with great anticipation for it.

The prophet Isaiah asks, “Do you not perceive it?”

Are you mindful of God’s work among us?

Mark Rails, writing in the *Christian Century* (May 15, 2007) writes about mindfulness:

¹ Walter Bruggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 7.

Mindfulness is a divine attribute that has received little theological attention. Perhaps this is because it is so easily absorbed into the broader category of love. The distinction I would suggest is this: Mindfulness is love to fall into absentmindedness. It is focused, sustained attention toward the beloved. In this way, mindfulness seems less tied to the cognitive functions of the mind and closer to what we call an act of will. Mindfulness is choosing to cherish and then choosing again and again—never to go back from that initial decision. Devoted, spouses, dedicated friends, caring parents are all mindful of the ones they love. Above all else, God is mindful of humanity...

Jesus was divine mindfulness incarnate. He noticed those who were forgotten. He cherished those who were despised. In the midst of a crowd pulsing all around him, Jesus noticed the touch of a despairing woman who merely grazed the 'hem of his garment.' On the cross, Jesus noticed the penitent thief beside him making room in his heart for God... We are called to be mindful of one another. This is our choice to make again and again ..”

I would add that we are called to be mindful of God's works among us through one another and through God's Spirit.

Why is it easier for us to rely on what God has done already, and why is it difficult to look forward to a new thing? Because what God has done is done. We can point to it. It is easier to be FLOP Christians (Fear of losing our past Christians).

The new thing God is doing is uncertain, and there is a part of us that it does not believe that it can be as grand as what God has done already. There is a part of us that thinks that God has already done what God was going to do that was really significant. We struggle to believe that the best is yet to come. We have become cynical about the newness of God.

But -- we have forgotten that we worship a living God; a Still-Speaking God.

I see God as the God who is making new paths.

In places in Latin America, even until today, many “campecinos” people of the country that work that land used machetes - “mochos”- to make paths; to cut through in order to clear a way. And sometimes up hills.

I personally believe that our living God is cutting through the wilderness; through la “maleza” in order for us to walk through a direction. I would say that we rejoice and remember with great gratitude and pride the ways the God has brought us thus far. But, how wonderful that there are still new paths that we have not walked over, because God is preparing them for us, for our time.

Not only is God preparing new paths for us, but there is a promise that God will “give us to drink” in this new way.

Lenten discipline of introspection, I invite you to adopt an additional discipline: let go of the past and the pain. Become a FIMO Christian (*Fun in Moving On*). One who asks, “What is it that God is going to do? I am ready.” “Where is God taking us? I am going.” “It is in our great heritage that we stand. How can I walk forward?”

God is doing a new thing, “Now it springs forth - do you not perceive it?”

Amen.