

Listen God Is Calling; God is about to do a new thing. Do you not perceive it? Southeastern Iowa Synod Assembly May 17-18, 2024

**Sermon Bishop Current
For Festival of Pentecost (Assembly and for Congregational worship)**

Scripture Readings: Isaiah 43:16-19, Acts 2:1-4 and 14-21, and Matthew 28:16-20

Much to my delight this spring there is an indigo bunting flitting about in our backyard. What are some new things you are seeing or hearing these days? (pause)

I am guessing as you stop to consider the question there are many new things that you can think of.

Yet, asking the question in a different way may cause a pause as we consider -

How about sharing a new thing that God is doing?

The synod deans sat together a few weeks ago and pondered this question together sharing new things God is doing in our lives – new calls, new hobbies, new conversations, new appreciation of confirmation students, new ministry opportunities, new connections. I shared about myself finally listening to my body and mustering courage to hire a personal trainer (turns out hanging up my bike after RAGBRAI wasn't a good call) and the joy and curiosity that God is stirring in me as I learn anew about the strength of muscle and breath in the midst of grimacing and sweating.

It is one thing though to ponder new things we are already noticing – perceiving around us or to consider how God is at work through new things that are emerging in our lives as we are already experiencing it – now! Hindsight is 20/20 is a saying for a reason, right. And mostly, when we share about new things, we share about good things, shiny things, and things that bring us joy.

Yet what about when the new things that emerge aren't awesome and in fact messy or difficult? In the midrash, a collection of Jewish interpretations of scripture, Rashi comments on Exodus 19:5, "All beginnings are difficult." It is true.

New things can be challenging, messy, scary... new jobs, new babies.

New things can be awkward, avoided, overwhelming...new relationships, new congregations, new projects.

New things can bring fear, loss, grief...new diagnoses, drastic change, the death of a loved one.

The prophet Isaiah speaks God's promise "I am about to do a new thing" to people exiled from their homeland for generations. They had become dull to hope and doubted God's promise in their waiting. This word would have likely been received with "Yeah, sure, we will believe it when we see it" and then Isaiah goes on and shows them the way. Shows them the way that God delivered the people through the Red Sea making a way for them from slavery to freedom. God didn't abandon God's people in slavery, bondage, hopelessness but meets them, dwells with them, calls leaders from among them, and God does a new thing.

For it is true that our lives bring experiences of being stuck in the wildernesses, the deserts, and even in exile, and it is also true that God consistently shows up for God's people in all of those places too. We, humans, give up, turn away, go it ourselves, throw our hands up, turn on one another,

- basically sin and fall short time and again. **And**, God is always making things new for God's beloved – new life, new freedom, new justice, new mercy, new peace, new healing, new love. Turning us from our sin, ourselves, and toward God and one another.

We see evidence throughout all of scripture – new beginnings, new creation, new things, new life... "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." (Genesis 1:1), "Behold, I am making all things new." (Revelation 21:5), "I am about to do a new thing. Now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?" (Isaiah 43:19) "Therefore, if any anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation; old things have passed away, behold, all things have become new." (2 Corinthians 5:17)

For all things become new in God through Jesus Christ. In order to save us from ourselves, God's Word became incarnate and lived among us. We hear the prophet's promise, "I am about to do a new thing... Do you not perceive it?"

In Jesus-

who lived among us to love us all from death to life again.

who made all things new in seeking out and loving the forgotten, the ordinary, the lost, the extravagant, the poor, the courageous, the rejected, the meek, the lonely, the sick, the peacemaker, the imprisoned, the grieving, the dying, the sinner, the saint.

who made room for all at the table, even the betrayer, and promised paradise to the criminal from the cross.

who, on the cross, meets us in all of our suffering, in the world's deep groaning and holds it all, on behalf of us, on behalf of the world so that in dying, he destroys death and in rising promises eternal life once and for all.

And this promise of eternal life, the promise of grace and love for us each new day, is impossible to perceive – it is foolish, it is impossible, it is even scary.

Yet, nothing is impossible for God. God makes all things new through the cross and empty tomb – whether we perceive it or not – it is for us and for the sake of the world. God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through him (John 3)

Indeed, Jesus' gift of healing and life through his cross and resurrection are eternally new. God continues to do a new thing...

showing up at the empty tomb greeting Mary in her anguish.

showing up in the locked room, where the disciples hide in fear, restoring their faith through the breath of life.

showing up on the mountainside, sending the disciples, of all time and places, to share the Good News with a reminder that they will never be alone.

showing up in that Pentecost square, as the diverse voices in the crowd could not be understood until the Spirit of God filled them with God's Word of love and life which all could hear loud and clear in their own language.

And

God continues to live and move among us, showing up in our locked rooms, in our wildernesses, our deserts, our tombs, our public squares. We may not always be aware. We may not always perceive it. We may do our human best to push God away.

Yet, God is always doing a new thing, in the water, at the table, in the sacred stories, in the breath of life, in forgiveness of sins, in the muck of our lives, in glimpses of joy, in the communion of saints – creating for us, for the world, the promise of abundant life and showing up through the power of the Holy Spirit through the Body of Christ in the midst of it all.

Listen. Listen, God is calling: *Beloved child of God, I love you no matter what. You are always being made new. I will be with you always to the end of the age.*