

***A New Thing***  
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**May 5, 2019**  
**Easter III**

**Isaiah 43:14-21**  
**Luke 17:11-19**

On a recent car trip to visit our daughter in Boston, I pulled out a couple of CD's that had been put together by our son back when he was in high school. Will calls them "Car Song CD's". Good old rock and roll for the road.

One of the tunes is a re-make of the hit song, "I'm a Believer," made famous back in the 60's by the Monkees, the first made-for-TV rock group. One of the foursome, Peter Tork, died only a couple of months ago.

This version of "I'm a Believer," though, was not by The Monkees but by the contemporary band, Smash Mouth – you've heard of them I'm sure! You actually might remember the song from the first *Shrek* movie. And, I have to say, I like the more recent version better – which is a big admission from someone who thinks that nothing tops the music of the 60's.

That musical revelation reminded me that not every original song or thought or piece of writing is superior to those that come after them. Some improve on or at least stand side-by-side with the original. We may love the King James Bible for its poetry and beauty, but many modern translations are more accurate to the original text and help us to understand the Bible's meaning more clearly.

Many times people see new approaches to music or any beloved tradition as a loss. Try to innovate and some think that you have taken a leap into a strange new world from which you will never return. Hold one contemporary service and folks start worrying that you're going to shut down the organ and turn up the amplifiers.

But some of us love both organ and amp, classical and contemporary. I would not want to lose any of our church's great music, from Bach to Wesley to Fanny Crosby. And it's always good to remember that the early Methodists were criticized for using contemporary melodies of their day – sometimes bar tunes – to set their words to.

God does not speak only King James English but in every language and idiom – maybe even rap and hip-hop, if your ears can imagine that.

And that's just the point: God has a great imagination. As the coming of Spring reminds us every year, God is the great innovator. Who would have thought of an aardvark or a giant sloth? Not pretty to my eye, but there they are, all part of the natural order of things, an order that is predicated on the new evolving from the old. It's the way God set it all up.

“Remember not the former things, or consider the things of old. Behold, I am doing a new thing. It is springing up right before your very eyes. Can you not see it?”

God said those words through the prophet Isaiah to the Jewish people who at that time were captives in a foreign land. God was offering them a new way, a way that would take them home again, and it was an offer that required at least two things.

First, they would need to let go of the past. “Remember not the former things...” Captivity was not what the Israelites wanted, but it was all that some of them knew. God wasn’t asking them to forget everything that they held dear to make something positive happen. For the Jewish people, “remember” is a powerful and fundamental word. If you’ve ever been to a Passover Seder recall the way the entire meal is organized around remembering how God brought the people out of slavery in Egypt to freedom. Remembering the past means re-enacting that liberation in the present.

So much of what our own faith is about is remembering and giving thanks for what God has done in our lives. Moments of forgiveness, expressions of grace, inner experiences of the presence of the holy – they shape and mold who we are and set a direction for the future.

But God was asking the people Israel in this case not to be held in the grip of the past, not to be weighed down by how things worked and the way people were. Instead, they needed to open themselves to an entirely new way of looking at the world, a world of freedom and hope – just as they ancestors had done.

The same can be said for the 10 lepers who were healed by Jesus. At some level, it must have been hard for them to stop being defined by their disease and their outcast status in society. Of course they were overjoyed at their release from the captivity of that dreadful sickness and the isolation it had caused them to live in.

It’s no wonder then that nine of them didn’t go back to thank Jesus once they were healed. They had a lot of people to see and plenty of lost time to make up for.

But if they were really to move into their new life, they would need to give up the old one. They were no longer wasting away, damaged, “unclean.” They were renewed, restored, resurrected. Their self-image would need to catch up with their new physical reality. They, too, were asked to look at their world in a new way, a world where there were no longer boundaries between races and peoples and lifestyles but all were embraced by God’s loving circle. An Easter world.

So, “Remember not the past.” Let go, relinquish.

But then, “Behold the new.” See what God is bringing to you. Embrace the future. And discover that future by living fully in the present. Look at the world. Look at other people. Look at your life – not as you revere it in the golden glow of a bygone day or dream it will one day be, but as you are right now. And see how God is working, what God is making in you.

As you look at your life on this fifth day of May, in this season of resurrection, what new thing is God doing? What is changing, evolving, coming to birth? And what do you need to let

go to allow the new to come? What do you need to relinquish in order to allow growth to spring up? What relationship needs to be addressed? What attitude needs to change? What way of looking at the world needs to be tweaked?

To be sure change is a hard thing. Most of us like things pretty much the way they've always been. But change is the one thing we can count on in life and the way that life evolves and grows. So we can resist change or, as Emmett Fox writes, we can embrace it, "Welcome any change that comes into any phase in your life;" Fox urges, "insist that it is going to turn out for the better – and it will. See the Angel of God in it, and the Angel of God will make all things new."

Clearly, God is doing a new thing at Hamden Plains UMC. There are hallowed traditions and decades of treasured relationships that undergird this community of saints. I can remember back to some pastors who served here forty years ago.

But there is something new, something unprecedented happening here as well. You as a body are not resting in your past but are looking to an emerging future that will keep Methodism alive in this place and bring new generations the love of God in Jesus. A love that is as old as time itself but fresh as buds that are bursting forth around us.

"Behold, I am doing a new thing." God is constantly creative. The world is continually transforming itself. And, whatever changes God is planning, whatever new things God is bringing, they're going to be good. Just as God promised to "make a way in the wilderness" for the Israelites, God will be with you as you travel together to your future as a church family and will help you find your way to blessing, in whatever shape that may take.

True, the road may be a little bumpy and the way somewhat uncertain, but the outcome is in God's hands. God will have the final word, and that word is life. New and abundant life.

How do I know that?

Well, I'm a believer. How about you?