

How do you feel about all things new? When it comes to most things, my husband is excited by what is new. He looks forward to new movies, new TV series, getting new clothes, new cars, new tools. However, you should hear him complain whenever I buy a new book. My father, on the other hand has very little interest in most new forms of entertainment, preferring the comfort of familiar stories, movies, and reruns of old favorite TV shows. He refuses to wear new clothes unless my mom physically removes his old ones. He even kept his old work truck after it became undrivable.

Sometimes new can be intimidating. It took my mother a while to get used to a Kindle, but after she got over the fear of breaking it, she enjoys its many applications like easier access to her email and taking and sharing pictures. She even proudly upgraded her Kindle on her own.

Sometimes new can be scary and exciting at the same time as when you start school, move to a new place, start a new job, retire, get married, have children. New can also be threatening because it is a change, something is going to be different which means we will need to acknowledge the change, and perhaps make changes to our lives.

All three of our readings this morning reveal how God feels about new, because they are about God making all things new. This newness is not for its own sake nor that of novelty or getting attention. The newness in our readings today is about the redeeming work of resurrection life God is up to in the world, work that brings God closer to us and us closer to God and each other.

In our reading from Acts of the Apostles we heard about the criticism Peter received because he welcomed a new group of people into the early church. These new members were not met with open arms, because there was an early view that only people who were of the Jewish faith, like Jesus and the disciples, could be members of the church. But Peter said that tradition needed to change because God called him to go to Gentiles, a word for anyone outside the Jewish faith. Through prayer and experience Peter changed his heart and his mind and welcomed these new members. I love the part where he realized this was God's will and said, "Who was I that I could hinder God?" In other words, Peter was not going to get in the way of God's will that all people regardless of race, religion, or gender are welcome to follow Jesus and be part of the church. Peter's change

helped change the hearts and minds of other church members to be more inclusive than they were before. This can be a good reminder for us modern followers of Jesus when we reflect on how we respond to changes we make in order to welcome and include people who want to be part of a church community.

In the reading from the Revelation to John we see more of God's vision and how God longs to make "all things new." This newness is expressed in the vibrant language of love, where God dwells with people, and God comforts us by gently wiping tears from our faces. Living so intimately with God means changes in our lives as we would want to end wars, economic injustice, discrimination, violence, oppression and all the ways we harm each other for the sake of greed and power. Such a vision brings to mind the part of the Creation story where people were walking with God in the cool of the evening in the Garden of Eden, reminding us humanity was created to be in companionship with God and each other.

This might be a surprising revelation for those who imagine this book of the Bible is about punishment and destruction. Perhaps such changes will feel like the end of the world to some, especially if they resist or fight the kingdom of God because it can make them feel threatened, or like they are losing something. Newness and change can be disruptive. But harm is not God's intention. Creating heaven on earth by healing what is broken is God's intention.

This brings us to today's Gospel, which we often hear on Maundy Thursday, during Holy Week because it takes place just before Jesus' arrest, trial, and crucifixion. At the Last Supper, after Judas had left to betray Jesus and set all those painful events into motion, Jesus gave his disciples a new commandment.

The commandment to love is as old as the Bible itself. We find the commandment to love God with our whole heart, mind, soul and strength and our neighbors as ourselves in the Old Testament. Jesus made the commandment new by changing it to loving people as he loved them. That is not easy to understand. Often, we interpret it to mean copying Jesus. But some of what Jesus did we simply cannot do. For example, we cannot resuscitate our friends after they die. I wonder if Jesus' new command is deeper than trying to replicate his life. I wonder if it is simply receiving the love of God, and letting that love change us and influence our behaviors and our choices, like how we spend our money, how we treat people, especially those we disagree with, to forgive instead of hold on to grudges or take revenge, to confess when we have been selfish and repent, to change, and let God and make us new every day so that we can share this love with all we meet.

I want to say a quick word about the old, because I have people in my life I love very much who care deeply about what is old. When they hear or read about God making all things new, they see a profound disrespect for anything and anyone who is old; the things, traditions, and people they care about. I don't believe when God proclaims to make all things new that means what was old is going to be thrown away and forgotten. I believe it means what was old is going to be transformed, redeemed, renewed, and therefore is included with the new. This is the essence of resurrection life, which we celebrate throughout the Easter Season and every Sunday. When Jesus emerged from the tomb, he was still Jesus, he had not been thrown away, but he was changed, he was different. He was made new.

Jesus giving a new commandment does not mean the old one is meaningless, it just means it has new life breathed into it, transforming it, illuminating it. Through his life, death, and resurrection Jesus transformed the commandment to love God and our neighbors into something that looked less like a bunch of rules to a daily practice that looks more like Christ himself. God transforming the world into a new heaven and earth does not mean the beauty or the things we love that are here now will be wiped out; they will be transformed, renewed so that they can't be destroyed by carelessness or disease or illness.

To be sure, not everything that is new is the newness that God is creating. The stuff that continues to discriminate, causes harm to people, animals or the planet, the changes that puts money before the wellbeing of people, or makes it harder for anyone to receive care are not the stuff of the Kingdom of God. That means we have to practice discernment, like Peter did in the first reading today, and listen for God and learn to recognize the signs of resurrection life at work in the world.

Change can make us feel many things, but change can also be a way we can look for and grow closer to each other and to God who is still at work making all things – including all of us - new.