

**Sermon: May 02, 2010  
Fifth Sunday of Easter**

**Texts: Psalm 148; Acts 11:1-18; Revelation 21:1-6; John 13:31-35**

***Making All Things New***

At the beginning of our Second Lesson for today, taken for Revelations, we read these words: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth," and continues with the words, "See, I am making all things new."

And in our Gospel reading for today we read these words: "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Both passages speak of a God who seeks to restore a relationship with us and with all creation. In doing so, he challenges us to be open to and experience life and relationships in new and even radical ways. Through God's love we are transformed. Therefore, this morning's message asks the question: "What new thing is God doing in our lives today?"

It is easy for us to see the presence of this God of creation and newness during this season of the year. New life is springing forth all around us. We eagerly embrace this kind of change, for it brings about a visible beauty. It is clear that new life is springing forth.

There are, however, changes that occur in our lives that cause us discomfort. When there are negative changes in our health, or employment, or in relationships, we sometimes wonder where God is. What new thing can God possibly be doing when one has cancer, or when we are laid off, or when we lose a partner or spouse?

This whole issue of what is constant and what is changing is at the core of all of our lessons for today. In Psalm 148, the psalmist speaks with great certainty of that which is constant. "Praise the Lord", he says, and then begins to list those things that ought to give praise to God. The list includes those things that dwell in heaven and those things that dwell on earth. When we read this psalm, we can state that God's love for all creation is constant; it is something that we can be sure of.

When we read our passage from Revelations, we receive the further assurance that this creative and loving presence of God will continue even after this life comes to an end. The voice from above says, "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death shall be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first

things have passed away.” What a powerful passage this is, since it speaks of God who creates change in our lives and in our world, change which makes all things new. In fact, change is necessary in order to bring about something that is radically better than the old.

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus shows that he is an agent for God’s transforming love. In our Gospel lesson for today, Jesus begins to prepare his disciples for some changes that will take place in their lives. He says, “Little children, I am with you only a little longer” and “Where I am going you cannot come.” So the first change for the disciples is that he will no longer be physically present with them. Their sense of this change is that it will not be good for them, for they have found comfort and meaning in his presence.

Jesus goes on to say that he is going to give them something new, a new commandment. This new commandment is that they should love one another. Their love for others and their love for those around them are to be in response to the love that Jesus had for them. He then says, “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” In other words, Jesus will become a constant presence in their lives through the love that they share for each other. This love, as shown to them by Jesus, transcends all human boundaries and barriers to this love.

But what happens when the changes of our lives make us feel uncomfortable? What if we are happy with the way things are? What if Christ’s commandment to love requires that we love those that we don’t want to love?

A classic example of this struggle is found in our First Reading for today, taken from the book of Acts. It tells of how the early Christian church struggled with issues of diversity. When we read the book of Acts, we learn of how the church grew from its beginnings in Jerusalem with a few followers of Jesus, slowly reaching out well beyond Jerusalem, finding new believers in new villages and new regions of the world.

Those first followers of Jesus were first faithful and practicing Jews. And those with whom they first shared the good news of Jesus were also faithful and practicing Jews. They were able to present their case for Jesus based on the Messianic expectations of all Jews.

But then something happened that they didn’t expect. Many of those who came to believe in Jesus came from the Gentile community. To the Jews there were only two categories of people. You were either Jewish, a descendant of Abraham, or you were a Gentile. You were either an inheritor of the covenant God made with Abraham, or you were someone who was outside of this covenantal relationship. So the fact that those outside of this covenantal relationship began to accept that Jesus was the Messiah, the son of God, was a point of great concern to many Jews.

Many were openly critical of the disciples going to places that were known to be in Gentile territory and associating with such folks, sometimes even dining with them. This violated many of the traditions and commandments that had been given to them in the Old Testament. So they ask Peter, “Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?”

In the response of Peter that follows their question, he makes clear that God is creating something new. Through the story of two visions – one that is Peter’s – and another that comes to a Gentile person – it becomes clear that this new thing is of God’s doing. After sharing this story of his vision, and learning of the vision that comes to the Gentile Cornelius, “If then God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?” His critics have no basis for their argument, and so they begin to praise God, saying “Then God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life.” In other words, we accept that God is doing something new.

For me the moral of this story is this, **WHEN GOD IS CREATIING CHANGE – DON’T GET IN THE WAY! FOR WHEN GOD CREATES CHANGE – IT IS FOR THE GOOD OF ALL CREATION!**