

A New Thing!
A sermon by David Roquemore
First Presbyterian Church, Newton NC
November 13, 2022

Isaiah 65: 17-25

We read this passage from Isaiah, and we may be dumbfounded by its vision. God is doing a new thing! God is acting, and something brand new is coming. A new heaven, a new earth. We can't even imagine what that will be!

Isaiah tries to describe it: he talks about aging, about children, about people building houses and living in them. He talks about animals who are enemies being friendly. All of it sounds too fantastic to believe!

You all don't know my son Peter. When he was a little boy, about 30 years ago, he used to absolutely gross his older sister and brother out by going to library, where he would check out these videos with names like, "Predators, volume 3." He would watch for hours as wolves killed sheep and big cats chased down and ate gazelle. It is really hard to believe that these animals will sit peacefully together.

All along in this passage is also the call for the people to be good to each other, to support each other, to care for each other. This is what we do in the church —we take care of each other. God isn't asking us simply to be "do-gooders" out there doing things. God asks us to care for one another in the right way.

So one time in college a friend of mine said I should come with him, and he and another guy and I went to do a project on a house. The friend had heard about it at church. We were going to clean up the yard of a disabled fellow who lived alone. We went, and no one was home. Undeterred, we mowed and raked, trimmed the bushes. We did all this work, piled up the stuff by the road. Then we left feeling real good about the good we have done. We were do-gooders for sure!

Then we told our religion professor what we had done. We expected praise but we got none. That was illegal, he said. You were trespassing. You did not get his permission. Nothing you did was carefully thought through. You are just mindless do-gooders.

On the other hand, even when you are supposed to be there doing good, you get into trouble!

We were on a mission trip and we went to a house in SC where an old man lived. He was somewhat reclusive, but his brother told us what needed to be done. His brother was the owner of the house and the old fellow's guardian. We worked and realized we needed to trim some bushes so we could get to the house. We set the group working, mowing and trimming. After a while the house began to look pretty good; at least it wasn't unkempt. Then the old man came out and yelled at us for destroying God's creation.

You just can't win, you know? But we can win! God is working through us and with us as we seek to do his will according to his word. In the case of that old man, we knew we were doing good: we'd been hired by his brother who took care of him. The back of his house had rotten paneling on it; the house was insulated only by his enormous collection of paperback books! When his brother dropped by mid-week, we told him the old man had complained about our work; the brother assured us we should keep going. Despite the man's protests, we were doing good.

Sometimes when you do good, you do it with people complaining, and you find that they are simply tied to the past. They can't get their heads around something different. They can't see the vision. What God does is create the heavens and the earth anew!

And God does that, I believe, with our help and participation! Not that God *needs* our help but he does want it. He desires it, and asks for it. We gladly respond to his call in faithfully obedient perseverance. (Do you see the last few sermons falling into place here?)

God creates all things new, and invites us to participate. Now, we ought to be involved in that creation, each of us in the way God calls us to be and gives us gifts to be. Not everyone can be a structural engineer, but not everyone can paint walls, either. Each of us is given gifts to do different things, and we all bring our gifts and work together. When we do that, we find that good things result.

When I was a child we lived in Mt. Pleasant, SC. In those days there was one bridge over the Cooper River to Charleston. It was one lane each way. You had to be careful; even a fender-bender would tie up traffic in both cities. We went over that bridge about once a week to go to the grocery store. Along the way, we pass these old houses where the bridge met the roadway in Charleston. I would look at those houses and think that some day, I will fix them up. Perhaps that was an early indication of my career.

What childhood memories, or desires do you have, that you have ignored for these many years? What things have you always wished we could do, that you haven't attempted? What might God be calling you to accomplish, that you could, if you but start?

A few years ago I was back in Charleston for a day; we drove on interstate highways and went over the top of those old houses, right onto the newest bridge, the third by my count. So one way to accomplish these things is to go over them, to ignore the reality on the ground and remove the traffic from those areas. I don't know if those old houses have been replaced or simply allowed to fall into ruin. Since no one drives by them twice a day, they have fallen away from memory and attention. No one notices them now.

The world is full of places like that, of streets or towns that need a hand, that need help, that need the people living in them to take up the cause and work for them to improve. We can do that; we can be God's partners in making all things new — the question is will we?

Now I invite you to bring forward your commitments for the coming year, to say to God and through this action to one another that yes, we are willing to be a part of what God is doing, here in this town, here in this congregation in this place. God makes all things new — are you willing to be a part of that? Come forward. Place your commitment cards in the plate and your time and talent sheet in the other.

Thanks be to God, and thanks to you, for all you do and commit to do today! Amen,