

## *Meditation – ‘New songs; new things’*

This began as an attempt to honour what the Church now calls ‘Christian Family Sunday’ – otherwise known as the sixth Sunday of Easter – the second Sunday in May – Mother’s Day...you get the idea.

The ‘new’ designation is meant to honour all kinds of families, and women who aren’t biological mothers (but who have nurtured children nonetheless) – new names for new times. But of course, not every new thing gets an eager response.

New things are much more often a source of anxiety. New neighbours, new jobs, new classmates, new rules...change activates something primal in us, and it is easier to resist than embrace these moments. And yet, the Psalmist invites us to find new expression for an ancient truth.

*O sing to the Lord a new song for the Lord has done marvellous things.*

The work of God (according to the Psalmist) is eternal and expansive. The work of God is revealed across cultures and species. Creation itself is moved to rejoice, and the faithful are urged to sing a new song. So what does a new song sound like? Is it possible to re-imagine the praise we offer, never mind re-imagine the way we understand or encounter ‘Holy things?’

Timeless truth finds new perspective – language adapts to ensure the current generation understands these ancient things – praise adapts and expands to ensure that those who were not previously considered worthy are finally included in the chorus. God’s ‘eternal’ nature does not imply unadaptable. God’s nature in fact is highly resistant to human classification. But there’s a problem.

New songs take time to learn, and as any worship leader can tell you, congregations prefer the familiar tunes – ‘the old hymns.’

Generally speaking, we resist change. Familiar is safe. Familiar is comfortable. We’re wired for comfort and safety. (I’m not talking to you bungee jumping, jet-ski riding, rodeo clown thrill-seekers.) Most of humanity survives by not taking chances. Our current situation is proof of that.

The overwhelming majority of the population is following the guidelines – trying to keep one another safe. The rule breakers are grabbing headlines, but one of the reasons they act like this is that they are scared of this new way of being. It’s not familiar; not comfortable.

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Everything is new, and we don’t want ‘new’ right now – we want what we used to have: we want to travel, to gather, to return to a moment where disease didn’t dominate our thinking. But this is where we are, and the beauty of Scripture – the wonder of faith – the truth about God; all these are present even when we can’t easily see them – even when they present as something new.

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Jesus’ disciples had to adapt to new things too. New language – new attitudes toward God – new ideas about life and death. Peter keeps showing up as the measure of how they navigated these changes.

His swerving back and forth throughout the gospels – especially where Jesus is concerned (*we’ll go with you Lord – three times denied knowing Jesus: you are the messiah / get behind me Satan*) suggest that he was struggling to find a safe and comfortable place to stand. Here in Acts, we see Peter turning the corner, but it takes a heavenly vision to do it.

Traditions are safe. History and origin stories are comforting. And this vision given to Peter rubs against his traditions and his habits. Food laws are important to faithful Jewish folks. They help order the universe: this is clean, this is not; this is Holy, this is not. To abandon the rules – to adopt new behaviour – surely this undercuts the foundations of faith...

‘Never have I ever...’ says Peter – and the heavenly voice wonders aloud when Peter (or any human person, for that matter) was given the power to decide what is Holy and what is not.

A new thing emerges from the chaos of our old habits and traditions. Its new – neither better nor worse (right now, at least) than anything else. And if we are able to see something new as a gift from God (rather than an awkward imposition driven by fate – something that robs us of our freedom, or places us at some imagined disadvantage) then we can claim that divine gift AND know that God desires only good for us.

If we really believe the Scriptures we claim to treasure, then we’ll recognize that God is the arbiter of what is good and what is not. And from the beginning, God called the entire Creation ‘very good.’ It is possible that our creations – traditions, rules, habits and so on – might not measure up.

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Attitudes built on privilege; doctrine that springs from fear; decisions made based on centuries of misunderstanding. How can we call these things good? What gives us the right to declare some things Holy and other things not...?

Racism, sexism, ableism, nationalism – all these are systems built on human ignorance and the misappropriation of Scripture. And time and time again, the Spirit uses our current circumstances to remind us that we don’t have all the answers – that we are not the last word in who or what is worthy, or sacred, or precious.

Peter is led, reluctantly to be sure, into the presence of those whom his tradition named unclean. (<sup>Acts 10:28</sup> and he said to them, ‘You yourselves know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or to visit a Gentile; but God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean.’) and that same spirit urges us today to consider our ‘traditions’, to examine our doctrines, to sing a new song.

More than just re-naming a hallmark holiday (Happy mother’s day by the way – I am a traditionalist) the Spirit is guiding us through a reimagination of what worship looks like and how congregations function during (and following) a pandemic. So too is the Spirit urging some in the church to acknowledge the harm our arrogance has caused to first nations people – people of colour – immigrant populations – LGBTQI folk. That ‘old-time religion’ that some would promote as an ideal is making way for a new expression of faithfulness; and not for the first time. The expression of religious convictions – the rules of engagement where human relationships are concerned - are still ours to make, but Scripture suggests to me that God blesses variety, and all manner of things that may seem new to us are familiar and beloved by God

We can respond to new things from fear – claiming sacred traditions are being ignored or cast aside – or we could try a chorus of a new song.