

A Fresh Perspective

18 February 07

Isaiah 43: 18-19b (TEV)

But God says, "Do not cling to events of the past, or dwell on what happened long ago. Watch for the new thing I am going to do. It is happening already—you can see it now!"

Sermon nugget: How do we embrace change and look at things in a fresh new way?

Today, we're talking about getting a fresh perspective on things, and that's sometimes a bit challenging for some of us. How do we do that, when we're reluctant to let go of what has been, and step toward who knows what?

I'd like us to try something to get us started down that road. You know how many of us have the same habits, and do the same things the same way day after day after day? That includes coming to The Garden. Frankly, I can often tell who's here and who's not by looking toward certain tables in certain areas of the room. That's because most of us are creatures of habit and try to sit in or near the same place. I know who to look for in which places.

How would it be today, to get a fresh perspective on things, if we got up and took a different seat? I'll change my normal place, if you'll change yours. OK? 1-2-3—let's move!

OK now. How does it feel? A little awkward, I would guess. That's because we've changed something, and most of us aren't too keen on change. We don't like to go down a new road because it's not predictable; we don't know what to expect. Changing and adjusting to new ways can be difficult. Pop culture expert, Sponge Bob, has something to offer on that topic. Let's take a look.

One of my favorite stories about change involves a bishop in the Methodist Church. I can't recall if I've shared with this you before or not, but if I don't remember, then you probably don't either! At any rate, the year was 1870, and the bishop was talking to the president of a small denominational college, sharing his conviction that nothing new could be invented.

The educator strongly disagreed, and believed there was a world of discovery out ahead. The college president said, "Why, I believe it may even be possible for men in the future to fly through the air like birds." The bishop was shocked, and said, "Flying is reserved for the angels. I beg you not to mention that again lest you be guilty of blasphemy!"

Who was that bishop? Bishop Milton Wright, father of Orville and Wilbur Wright. Only 33 years after the bishop made that statement, his two sons made their

first flight in a heavier-than-air machine, and, as they say, the rest is history.

I doubt seriously that any of us could argue with the fact the word has changed radically in the last 20-30 years, and there no reason to think that it's going to be any different in the future. If anything, the changes are going to come at us faster and faster. I like to think, and I hope you agree, that many of the changes we've experienced have been for the good. I really choose to believe that's true.

I think I've shared this football story with you before, and anyway, those of us who've visited the NCAA Hall of Champions downtown have witnessed the statue commemorating the earlier time and the change that followed.

In 1905, football was a low-scoring game of running and kicking. It was literally "three yards and a cloud of dust." It was a game where guys in leather helmets and very little padding inched they way down the field toward the goal line. The offense consisted of formations like the "flying wedge,"—the statue that's at the entrance to the Hall of Champions. In it, seven players ran together into the middle of the opposition to try to gain three or four yards. It was a tough, slow game, and resulted in many injuries.

In 1906, things changed, and the forward pass was made legal. It was now possible to gain 40 yards or more with a flick of the wrist. However, during the first season, most teams resisted the change, and stayed with their old game. Not so with St. Louis University. The coaches quickly adapted, and used the forward pass extensively. That season, they outscored their opponents 402-11. They offered other teams a fresh perspective on the game, and it was changed forever.

We must be willing to change if we are going to be a vital force, individually and corporately, in the world today. Take, for instance, UPS. One of the slogans the company uses quite effectively here is "What can Brown do for you?" However, when the company tried to get a stronghold in Europe, that slogan was not well-received.

After some market analysis was completed, the company learned why. Now Brown to UPS represented the brown color of the trucks, the brown uniforms, etc, but to the Europeans, the brown shirts conjured up remembrance of a not-so-pleasant time when the Nazis invaded western Europe. Do you know what UPS did? They changed, because to continue to do what they had always done would not help them deliver the product. We have to change to effective and timely.

I do believe that change is inevitable, and it is good for us, and very healthy. Not only that, but it is absolutely essential if we are going to grow and thrive and mature as individuals, as a community, as the world, and as The Garden. Jesus understood that, and often talked about

the need to change. He used images like putting new wine in old wineskins. He understood that keeping things “as is” doesn’t suffice to meet the need. Using new wineskins is essential because they are flexible, and will give a bit to accommodate the wine as it ferments.

The Bible passage we have for this morning has been a favorite of mine since the beginning of The Garden, and it says it so well. It comes from the writings of the prophet Isaiah, and he’s sharing God’s words when he writes: But God says,
“Do not cling to events of the past, or dwell on what happened long ago. Watch for the new thing I am going to do. It is happening already—you can see it now!”

It’s sometimes easy for us to keep clinging to what has been, and never open our eyes to see the new thing, but that isn’t what God intends for us. God is asking us to be faithful, to be trusting and to step out where God is leading us. Our ancestors in the Bible—like Abraham and Sarah, Moses and Aaron, and other—had the kind of faith it takes to pick up and go to a new place (or move to a different seat in the room), and we’re asked no less.

Len Sweet, in his book *Carpe Manana (which means “seize tomorrow”)*, makes an analogy between seizing the future and skeet shooting. Anyone who’s every tried skeet shooting learns one basic rule pretty quickly—you have to lead the target. If we aim our gun at the target, but the time the bullet gets there, the target has moved. We have to shoot ahead of the target.

If we aim at today, or worse at yesterday, we will miss the opportunity that’s right on our doorstep. That’s why The Garden is going to be going through some changes. Many of these changes are coming about because of what you shared with us when you completed the marketing surveys we sent out last summer. Thanks for taking the time to do that survey and share some needed insights.

As I’ve mentioned before, one of the things you named as an important reason for being a part of The Garden is our theology. We’ve talked about what that is more specifically, but it seems that we need a way to say it so that others can understand what we’re about, too. The marketing team played around with several possible phrases to reflect, and finally came down on one that I like, and hope you do, too.

Marketing folks call this phrase a “tagline.” In the last few years, that has been “food for the spirit, wisdom for the soul,” and it has served us well. However, it doesn’t quite tell anyone about what we believe. So, in an attempt to reflect where we come down on our faith, we’re proposing a change in our tagline to “A Fresh Perspective on Faith.”

Along with that, we’re getting a new look, too. Our original logo was a flower that was blossoming. Now at our advanced age of 11 ½, it’s time for a new way to represent The Garden. Take a look at the screen, and watch the blossom morph into our new image.

And our website is changing, too. For one thing, we’ll have a new address, which is www.thegardenonline.org. The new one is a move toward the future, and will be much more interactive with lots options that we haven’t had in the past. I’m sure you’ll be excited to visit and see what’s there. Stan will take us on a tour of what the new site will be like. Take a look.

I believe with all my heart that God is trying to lead us to a new place, to a new day, toward a new thing. We’re being asked to leave behind the tried and true, the known and familiar, and to step out into new territory.

Responding to God’s call and following where God leads requires gathering up our courage and stepping out. It means taking a risk. I’ve always liked something Walt Kallestad, pastor of Community Church of Joy in Phoenix, once said. “The essence of faith is risk.” Faith is about going in a new direction, trying a new thing, meeting new people, looking a new way.

I’m convinced that God wants us to look toward the future, and I’ll tell you what—as we go there, I’m sure we’ll find God in it, waiting for us to join.

As Marcel Proust once said, “The real act of discovery consists not in finding new lands, but in seeing with new eyes.” Today we’re looking toward tomorrow with new eyes.