

"Do not remember the former things,
or consider the things of old.
I am about to do a new thing;
now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?"

Isaiah 43:18-19

I began my ministry in the mid-sixties with the 1928 Prayer Book, the 1940 Hymnal, and the altar firmly fixed against sanctuary wall. I know full well what "the former things" and "the things of old" are. I also know about new things springing forth over the forty-five years since those days of my antiquity. In my wildest dreams back then I would never have expected a woman to be elected bishop, or even a priest or deacon. It was inconceivable that our church would open clerical offices to persons who had partners of the same sex. But "new things have sprung forth" and we learn that Mary Glasspool has received the necessary approval of Standing Committees and Diocesan Bishops to be consecrated Suffragan Bishop of Los Angeles. And our diocese prays for Mary as she begins her new ministry.

Wow. The first "new thing" I faced around 1968 was the admission of young children to communion without being confirmed. What a crisis that was! Parents were furious. "I had to be confirmed before I could take communion!" Clergy weren't happy either because General Convention said it was up to each congregation to determine what age children could receive the sacrament. Churches that set the years around grammar school age would soon find families moving in from parishes that admitted toddlers to the rail.

Of course, the issue remains perception. As the passage from Isaiah puts it, "I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it." Of course the prophet was talking about God establishing his people and guiding them through the wilderness. But the question of perception is perhaps the abiding work of faith. Did the Israelites see the new work of God? And if they did, did they trust that it was truly God's work?

We know that Jesus also faced many questions about His Life and Ministry. When Mary anoints Him with costly perfume, one of His disciples questions the wisdom of wasting such a valuable resource when it could be sold and the money given to the poor. The passage quickly adds that he wasn't really interested in the charity but wanting the cash for himself. Again, the issue of perception. Who, in that day, really accepted Jesus as the Son of God; and who appreciated the way in which He carried on his ministry?

Shortly after Mary Glasspool was finally approved to be a bishop, I received an e-mail from a clergy acquaintance with the sarcastic note that we might as well paint Ichabod Crane over every Episcopal Church. We know that there are many people who haven't accepted the decisions made by the church in its tri-annual meetings called General Convention. I've lived through many changes and have listened to many parishioners who were angry with the decisions, including children taking communion. I have heard dissensions over Prayer Book renewal, revision of the old hymnal, passing the peace, moving the altars out from the wall, girls and women taking part in the liturgy and governance of the church, and now the effort to be totally and completely inclusive of all God's children.

I am sure that the feelings here at St. Alban's run the gamut. But again, the prophet's observation must be applied to all of God's activities in creation. "Do not remember the former

things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?"

God's activity isn't confined to any one Bible passage; but to the whole story of redemption which begins with creation in the Book of Genesis and ends with the promise in the Book of Revelation. In the former, God saw what was made and said, "It is good." In the latter, we hear, "and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away." (Revelation 21:4b)

The story of God's redemption throughout scripture and even as it unfolds century after century in our human history, is and always will be an affirmation of all that is good, the inclusion of all that is created, and a love and forgiveness that defies our human imagination. Do I know for sure that the decisions made by our church are the "new things God is doing?" No, I don't know for sure. But I do know that I have allowed each phase of the changes to challenge my faith. I have struggled to deal with them as they have sprung forth in my own life. And I still work to perceive what is God's will in it.

Next Sunday we recall the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem and the drama which leads Him eventually to a terrible crucifixion on the Roman device for capital punishment, the cross. Perhaps we might use the final days of our Lenten observance to focus on what the death and resurrection of Jesus really means? Maybe we can set aside some prejudices and presuppositions about God's presence in our lives, the "old things" as Isaiah put it; and truly see if something new is stirring around us. And, finally, do we perceive it?