

God's New Thing

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When I was growing up, I was mostly a perfect angel. (None of my immediate family is here, so they can't contradict me). But one thing I did struggle with *a little* was follow-through.

My parents would come and ask me to do a chore while I was watching tv, and I would say, *Sure! Absolutely! I love chores! But just let me finish this one episode of this show.* I was probably watching something fun on Nickelodeon, and there was no DVR or way to pause it. How would I know how it ended???

My parents would say, *Okay, no problem.*

Then they'd go away and come back in two hours and would I have done the thing?

No. I'd be in the exact same spot, right where they left me: having finished my show, and finished 3 more, and started another one. I'm sure there are no kids here today who do that. So, my parents got rid of our cable package so we would only have PBS to distract us.

So, then they'd find me reading a book and say, *Hey, you haven't finished your chores, will you do those now?*

And I'd say, *Sure, just let me finish this chapter.*
And they'd say, *Hmmm...this feels familiar but ok...*

They'd come back two hours later, and would my chores be completed?

No, of course not. They'd find me right where they had left me: now halfway through the book and even more invested in the story and less inclined to move.

I'm sure this was frustrating, especially for my dad who gave up ESPN in the middle of the playoffs to teach us a lesson we hadn't learned. And I understand this frustration now that I live by myself and I look at my sink and think, *I should probably do the dishes*, and then I think, *Hmm...maybe after I finish this show...*

I'm not alone in this, right? And it's frustrating whether you're waiting on yourself or someone else to finish something. You thought it would be done and it isn't.

This feeling of frustration was welling up as I read the lesson from Isaiah this morning. It sounds lovely, right? All of these promises from God about how things will be different; how God is creating a new heavens and a new earth, where the people live happy lives and war is no more. *Be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating*, God says.

I don't want to give God a hard time, especially today on Easter, right? I mean, it's pretty big day for God. But God made those promises like thousands of years ago, and they're still not done.

God said no more shall the sound of weeping be heard or the cry of distress but living in this world still makes us cry.

God said we shall build houses and live in them, but so many are without homes or homeland.

God said we will plant fruit and eat it, but so many are hungry.

I'm sure I'm not the first person to bring it up. God has been reminded *a lot*, and sometimes it feels like God hasn't moved. I wonder if Mary felt that kind of frustration on that dark morning.

God said Jerusalem would be a delight, but it didn't seem so delightful under the shadow of the crosses.

God said the lion would lay down with the lamb and there would be peace, but the Roman lion had very much destroyed the Jewish lamb.

God said people would live to be 100, but Jesus didn't even make it to 34.

What has God been waiting for?

God promised a new earth, but Mary is still living on the same earth, the earth where the oppressors always win, where people you love die...and then we get the first clue that, maybe, all is not how it seems.

Mary goes to the tomb...and the stone is not where they had left it. And she runs to the disciples and brings them to investigate...and Jesus is not where they left him.

At first, this is just a sign that the world is even worse than she imagined; that someone would be so cruel as to steal the body before it could be prepared for burial.

And then she hears, *Mary!*

Her name, from her beloved teacher, is a sign that she is not living in the world she thought she was living in, a world full of death and sadness. Now she knows that something has been going on behind the scenes.

While she was sleeping, before she was aware, as tears were still dripping down her cheeks, God was doing a NEW THING. Bringing new life where we only saw death.

In the beginning, when there was a formless void, God said *let there be light*.

When the Israelites were enslaved in Egypt, God sent signs and plagues so they could be liberated!

And when they were free, and Pharoah changed his mind and came after them—and it seemed like they would die between the water and the army—God parted the waters so they could cross over in safety.

When the people were sent into exile, God brought them back home.

When we were trapped by sin, Jesus liberated us on the cross.

The forces of death would like us to think that we live in the same world we've always lived in, and that nothing can be done. But God is creating a new heavens and a new earth—here among us—even when we don't notice.

Every second, babies are being born, addicts are becoming sober, enemies are reconciled, daffodils break through the earth, sins are forgiven, lives are changed!

God is not distracted, God is not deterred, God is not waiting for anything. This new thing is happening even right now, all around us, because God is determined that the world will not stay right where God left it.

We may not be in the new heavens and new earth just yet, but we are so, *so* much closer! We're getting there and God is working on it all the time.

God invites us into this work, too, because God is determined that we will not stay right where God left us either.

This is the second part of this Gospel, isn't it?

Jesus greets Mary, lets her embrace him, and shows her that the world is no longer what it seems: that God has done a new thing, that death has been defeated.

I'm sure she wants to linger there in this new earth, in the knowledge that God is working in this world. But what does Jesus say?

Don't hold onto me, Mary.

Jesus invites her into this new thing that he is doing, and she is transformed from a follower into an evangelist: a proclaimer of good news.

So now this woman gets to do a new thing too – preach! And she goes to the disciples with this good news that God is doing amazing new things and they are also invited.

And now the rest of the Bible, the book of Acts, all of the letters, is a witness to the fact that they are now doing a new thing, too! These fishermen and tax collectors are transformed into apostles and church leaders, as they go to new communities around the world and invite them into the new thing.

This is God's invitation to all of us this morning: to be transformed by God's love, and to join in the new thing that God is doing within us, among us, around us.

So, even though I know I *sometimes* still leave things undone, looking back over my past I can tell that I have not stayed where life has left me.

Even when I felt stuck or in pain or in despair, that was the very moment God was doing a new thing with me, to transform my life. Calling me over and over into the life God has promised and the life God has delivered. God will continue to keep working on me, and this gathering, and this community, until we truly are a new earth.

Alleluia!
Alleluia!
Alleluia!