



Good Shepherd Lutheran Church

“Behold, I am Doing a New Thing”

Isaiah 43:18-19 & Ps. 98:1

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“Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I am doing a new thing” Isaiah 43:18-19

“O sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things” Ps. 98:1

May 13, 2012
6th Sunday after Easter

Collect of the Day

O God, You have commanded us to love You above all things and our neighbors as ourselves. Grant us the Spirit to think and do what is pleasing in Your sight, that our faith in You may never waver and our love for one another may not falter; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Futurists are scientists and social scientists who try to predict the future. Often they are catastrophically wrong.

Time (magazine) confidently predicted in 1966 that by now the combination of technology and government programs will have made everybody wealthy. Ten percent of us would be working, the other 90 percent paid to be idle. Those who did work would have a short work weeks and everybody would have more free time than they knew how to use.

Buckminster Fuller, a distinguished futurist, predicted in 1960 that amid general plenty and prosperity, politics would fade away (which is interesting given what's been in the news).

Harper's (magazine) predicted in 1942 that the home of the future would have a "health room" with ultra-violet panels in the walls so that everybody could enjoy the benefits of daily exposure to UV rays and have beautiful tans. Sounds like a death trap today.

David Reisman, a highly respected sociologist, said in 1967 that: "If anything remains more or less unchanged, it will be the role of women and mothers." (I don't think my wife ever got that message . . . nor my daughters.)

Today futurists are predicting elevators into space, internet equipped contact lenses that will recognize faces and pull up biographical data and the like. They're talking about transhumans (part human, part machine) and they're talking about prosthetic brains.

When you look into the predictions and prophecies, you might be tempted to conclude humans are the only ones doing anything new. You might be tempted to think God is mostly standing on the sidelines, passively watching. You might think God did his creative work long ago, but then rested from it and has been resting ever since. You might think of God as disinterested and aloof, that is, unless we annoy him, in which case he might rouse himself and come down and stir up a tornado or a hurricane, or what the insurance industry calls some other “act of God.”

Yet, in today’s psalm, God’s people are exhorted to “Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done [and continues to do] marvelous things.” And again from Isaiah, “Remember not the former things of old (that is, don’t fixate on the past), for behold, I am doing a new thing.”

The philosophers used to talk about the universe and its creation in terms of a watchmaker who fashions a complicated clock, winds it up and then lets it run down. But science, of all things, is telling us the clock isn’t completed yet. The process of creation continues.

Remember Mt. St. Helen’s, how it blew its top in 1980? It scorched and leveled nearly 240 square miles of forest with 400 degree winds going over 600 miles an hour. Shattered trees littered its slopes like match sticks and everything was covered under a deep blanket of ash. The government made a National Monument of much of the area (thousands of acres) and decided to let it recover on its own, with no help from man. Outside this protected area lumber companies harvested the felled trees and replanted with firs which have grown remarkably well – but it’s just one thing, one monocrop (no diversity), all the same aged trees offering very little habitat for wildlife. Within the National Monument, however, (that area which received no help from man), what was a lifeless wasteland is now bursting with new life (trees, plants, animals, insects), a rich diversity of ecosystems. God’s creative work, even on this planet, is not finished. He’s still at it.

Astronomers are talking about zones in the universe

where under astonishing temperatures and pressures, stars and planets are still being formed and spun into space; the “maternity ward of the universe” they call it.

And it’s happening at the personal level. We see a little bit of God’s creative work every time a child is born. There’s a t-shirt that says, “When God created me, he was just showing off.” There’s some truth to that. Through his creation, God gives us a peak at his wisdom and creativity.

As parents we take pride in how cute our newborns are, but deep down we know we had very little to do with it. A pregnant mom takes in nutrients and vitamins and tries to provide a safe setting, but it is God who does the giving of life. Ps. 139, “For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.” They come out as little aliens, with all kinds of attributes already in place, strengths and weaknesses and distinct personalities that we don’t yet know: what makes them tick, and what will tick them off. They come out as little aliens to us, but not to him. He made them that way. Jeremiah 1, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you.” Long before we ever come to know him, he knows us. Isaiah 45, “I call you by your name though you do not know me.”

“Sing to the Lord for he does marvelous things.”

Every spring a pair of robins returns to our front yard from their southern habitat. Without any help from a GPS, they return to the same tree on the same front lawn, where they raise their young. You know, they are a dime a dozen; you have them in your yards too. “But not one of them” Jesus promised, “will fall to the ground apart from your Father.” So don’t worry. Instead “Sing to the Lord” you people of God, because if his eye is on the Robin and her little ones, you also know he’s watching over you and yours.

“Behold, I am doing a new thing.” It happens at the microscopic level as well. Some of your kids this summer will trade in their training wheels for a few bruises and scrapes and abrasions. But God has his eye on those too, for there’s a whole load of viruses and bacteria that would love

to use them as entry points. So He sends in army of white blood cells who attack with the ferociousness of the US Marines. They will coagulate the blood into a scab, and absolutely brilliant things happen behind that curtain. Without any conscious effort from your child, (and if he can keep his fingers off of it), the scab will fall off to reveal new, soft, pink skin underneath.

Part of the Lord's creative work is sustaining his creation, and that is on-going. Sometimes he uses us as his masks for that work as when a mother feeds and loves and teaches her children. Masks of God they are. And that's not only good for the child, but it's also meaningful and rewarding for the mom. Sometimes the Lord uses us to sustain his creation. Either way, it is the Lord's Work. From the Small Catechism, "I believe that God has made me and all creatures . . . and **still** takes care of them." So sing to the Lord you saints for he is always doing new things.

At funerals, I often think about the debt of praise and thanksgiving we owe, and it's not just for the promise of everlasting life. Often the people I bury are in their 80's and 90's. Most of them never had to sleep outside for lack of shelter, or go naked for lack of clothing, or even miss a meal for lack of food. That we are given all of that virtually without interruption . . . that is the Lord's doing. For the food he uses farmers as his masks to sustain creation, while also giving them something meaningful and rewarding to do. Conversely, where there is starvation, almost always it's because of man's warfare, or strife, or corruption or negligence. Where there is food sufficient, it is the Lord's doing and we owe him thanks. Sing with thanksgiving to the Lord.

The danger is that we walk through life without noticing. The danger is we never slow down to see the new things around us. The danger is we attribute the beauty and order of our universe to blind accident. The danger is we attribute our prosperity to our own work and only rarely return thanks to him. The danger is when you wake up in the morning, you think you're going to see the same show all

over again, that there's really nothing new under the sun. If that's what you're expecting, if that's what you're looking for, that's probably what you'll find. The danger is that we arrogantly assume humans are the only ones up to anything new.

So Windows 8 will be released later this year with great pomp and circumstance. Big deal! What is man doing to create new stars? So "the Freedom Tower" may soon be the tallest building in our country. The Lord will still have to come down to see it. So we can inject an egg with sperm to make an embryo using a powerful microscope and a fine needle; and we are on the front edge of made to order babies. God has been customizing babies just for us for thousands of years, and didn't even need a microscope.

Moreover, who gives us the wisdom? Who gives us the capacity to learn and discover and make breakthroughs? Could it be our technological advances merely reflect a little bit of his creativity and wisdom because we were made in his image?

Keep in mind, also: we only make things, and to do that we always need raw materials. God creates . . . out of nothing (no raw materials) . . . beautiful, beautiful things . . . simply by speaking them into existence. Such is the authority of his Word!

So sing to the Lord a new song, because the Lord is always up to new things. And not just things, he makes our hearts and minds new again.

A couple of weeks ago our black Camry rolled over 200,000 miles. To celebrate Stephanie pulled over and took a picture of the odometer and sent it to my phone. The car has many dings and nicks and bruises, but it's reliable. I suppose if we wanted, we could take it to a body shop and make the outside look almost new again. But that wouldn't fix the little puddle on the garage floor, and it wouldn't make the interior smell any better, nor would it take the vibration out of the steering wheel. Similarly, you and I are sinners, and we have plenty of dings and nicks and smells to show for it. We try to hide them, cover them over, make it look

good, but that won't fix what's underneath the hood. And so we need him to make us new again. We need him to recreate us inside and out, and that's precisely what he does for us.

When the Lord does his redeeming work on us, he's not just putting a new coat of paint on an old car. He's making us new again. Paul writes, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, the old has gone, the new has come." That, of course, points to baptism. Again, Paul writes, "We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead... we too may live a **new** life" (Rom. 6:4). Every time we see a baptism, we see the Lord creating something new, something out of nothing, no raw materials, just his authoritative Word. At once there is faith, where before there was unbelief. And there is a child of God, where before there was no such promise, only a child of the world.

Sing to the Lord, for he is doing new things. He's bringing new kids to our school for whom the Gospel of Jesus Christ is brand new. He's raising up new pastors and teachers who are just now graduating. They have loads of debt, but also loads of energy and love for the Lord. New congregations are being planted, and new hymns and songs composed, and there's new interest in the faith, for example, in China, where many of the churches are standing room only.

Futurists are often catastrophically wrong, but in His Word God has given us a more accurate and reliable glimpse of the future. I'm here to tell you that regardless of how bad your immediate prospects may appear, the big picture is a hopeful one. Our God loves his whole creation, all of it, great and small, and you are a part of that creation. On the cross he redeemed his whole creation, and in Holy Baptism you were made part of that redemption. And one day he will return with power and great might, and will make it new again, the heavens and the earth, you and me. He will make all things new and forever new. Amen.

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