

Easter 5 - Sunday, May 15, 2022
Revelation 21:1-6; John 13:31-35; Acts 11:1-18
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For two years now we've been talking about things getting back to normal. Normal where you can have a dinner party, normal where you can go to Costco without wearing a mask - even if you're going to Costco to buy masks – normal where you go to church and sing out loud without thinking about aerosols, normal where you sit at a table for a meeting, or sit at a desk in the classroom instead of sitting alone at a table at home staring at a laptop screen. Normal where we all come up for communion and kneel side by side; normal where I don't have a nagging worry in the back of my mind that the sound on the livestream isn't working and to anyone online I'm just going (blah blah blah with no sound). Normal where you didn't lose your job because everything shut down, or normal so that you're not always thinking of quitting your job because everything's changing too much. Normal where we're not worried all the time.

You know, normal.

“And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.” It's too bad the one seated on the throne didn't say, “See, I am making all things normal.” But that's not the promise we get. Instead, it's “See, I am making all things new. Out of a crisis I can make something fresh. Out of decline I am making something you've never seen before. Not bigger better and more, but new. Out of uncertainty and despair I am making a future. Even out of death, I am making life. I am making all things new.”

Now the fun thing about God making everything new is that it's nothing new. And the thing about leaving normal behind is that it's, well, pretty normal. Everywhere you look in the Biblical story, people are leaving “normal” behind,

while God keeps making everything new. Think about it: way back when, right near the beginning of the story, there are two people in a garden. You might know them as Adam and Eve. They are in this garden, this brand new fresh garden, where everything is neat and in order and harmonious and beautiful and rich just like the gardens and forests are starting to be again right now...but these two get themselves in trouble and they're sent out of the garden and they'll never ever get to go back to that great normal that was life in the garden. But the story keeps on going; there's always something new on the way, and they will find a different life. It doesn't just end when they say goodbye to normal.

Somewhere along the way something else new happens, and a couple named Abram and Sarai get word from God that they should pack up their whole life, and walk away from what is normal to go somewhere new. They have no idea where; God just tells them to go somewhere they've never been, and something new will happen. So they go.

Long after that all their descendants, hundreds of thousands of them, are slaves in a far away land called Egypt. Slavery has been normal for them for hundreds of years, but God does a new thing and sets them free from slavery. It's new, it's fresh; so new and fresh that nobody knows how to live that way. How do you live free when you've never known what it's like to be free? Some of the people want to go back to "normal," where normal was being a slave but you knew there'd be some food; where normal was where one kind of people dominated and the other kind of were kept in their place; where normal was that the rich made their living on the cheap labour of the poor; normal where everything was wrong...but predictable. There were those who wanted normal again, but God made things new, and even though an entire nation of people wandered lost in the

wilderness, God stayed with them, pitching a tent with them wherever they went, and they were never left to fend for themselves. Lost in a new life, and God lived right there with them.

Story after story after story of God making something new, even when life seemed like nothing more than a dead end. Even when everything ended on a cross and in a tomb God made something new and raised Jesus from the dead.

“Look – I’m making everything new.”

The Bible’s story, the story we’re a part of today, is full of people longing for normal again. And in that very same story God is always doing something new.

Something new like this: Jesus is having his last meal with his disciples (we heard this story just a minute ago). One of them has just left the table and run off into the night to tell the authorities where Jesus is, so that they can track him down and arrest him. Jesus knows what’s happening. He knows that so many of his followers Jesus will disappear when he needs them the most, he knows that Peter will deny even knowing him, and he knows how hard all of this is going to be on this little community of his followers; how this trauma will threaten to tear them apart. So he says, “I’m giving you a new commandment: Love one another. Just like I love you.” He doesn’t talk about revenge, or strategy, or fighting back; he just gives a new commandment to love: When friends betray friends, love one another; when you’re scared and want to run away, love one another. If you do run and hide, and the shame runs deep, love one another. If you’ve been loyal and your friend has not, love one another. While you’re lost, or afraid, or angry, or confused, love one another. When normal is slipping away, love one another.

It's an old command. But it's still always new. "Love one another," and our life together is made new again.

The one seated on the throne says, "Look, I'm making everything new," and we see something new like this, and we heard it before: Peter was one of those ones Jesus had told to love one another, and he's working on figuring out what that might mean, but like all the best good ideas it's taking him awhile to get it. He's been trying to see how far that love should reach, and so far he's been thinking that that love should maybe just reach to other Jews; people like himself, a Jew. Peter thinks that's just normal: For some reason he just thinks that Jews and Gentiles should keep away from each other. So God does a new thing, and convinces Peter in a dream that it's just not like that any more. He can eat with a Gentile named Cornelius - a Roman soldier – because God's love and life reaches further than we might think, and even Gentiles (even Greeks, French, Zimbabwean, Tanzanian, Philipino...) can become a part of this community of people who follow Jesus.

It's an old story, but it's always new. It's a story of God doing a new thing and drawing people together who would otherwise stay apart; it's a story of God doing a new thing and welcoming people who used to be locked out; it's a story of God doing a new thing and changing someone – someone like Peter, someone like me, maybe someone like you, and making us into people who pull down dividing walls brick by brick until there's room for the ones we once thought didn't belong.

"Look, I'm making everything new," says Jesus, the one who is sitting on the throne.

It's such good news. When there's another war, the same old thing, it's just so normal; when a handful of empires rule the world, the same old thing; when racism still runs deep in communities and systems and hearts, when there's another shooting in a mall somewhere; it's just the same old thing, it seems normal sometimes. The list goes on, the same old thing. And the one seated on the throne says, "All of that will be no more. Look, I'm making everything new."

When you grieve for what you've lost: your youth, your job, your best friend and partner; the one seated on the throne says, "Look, I'm making everything new." When your old habits that hurt just seem to keep coming back, when my own struggles don't seem to go away, when we worry together about where we'll end up...will they ever come back?...the one who is seated on the throne says, "Look, I'm making everything new." When we have no idea what that new thing will look like, the one seated on the throne says, "It's OK. Look, I'm making everything new." When normal is long gone, and we wait for what will take its place, the one seated on the throne says, "Look, I'm making everything new. Whatever it looks like, it will satisfy your hunger. It will wipe away tears. It will quench the thirst of a thirsty world."

"I'm making everything new."

AMEN.