**Sermon Isaiah 43:16-21 & 2 Corinthians 5:11-17 (General Synod 34 Texts)**

INTRODUCTION

This morning we are in the second week of a 6-week series called “6-word stories.” This is a form of storytelling that is not only, very concise, but also includes a twist or a punch, something poignant and thoughtful. So, over the next few weeks we thought we could apply this storytelling-method to any number of biblical texts in our lectionary, not least of which because we have short attention spans but also because we often benefit from short, to-the-point messaging. The “6-word” format is designed to distill down the central point of a narrative, to get us to the heart of a matter or to draw our attention to the moment where perspectives shift, or assumptions are challenged.

In the remaining weeks, we are inviting you to have a go at crafting your own “6-word story”. There will be supplies out in the gathering area and an opportunity to post your sentence on the wall for others to see. Some of worship team and others have already shared their stories during the service, and you may be willing to share yours too. We hope that you take this as an opportunity to reflect: on your journey, on your faith, on significant moments in your life or when you noticed God.

REVIEW LAST WEEK

Pastor Lori got us started last Sunday with a reminder from Matthew 11. Here was her 6-word story - “Weary ones, Jesus offers soul rest.” She spoke of the weariness that can weigh heavily on our hearts as we bear the burdens of this life and all the myriad of sorrows and challenges that we face every day.

I wanted to remind you of that phrase: “Weary ones, Jesus offers soul rest,” because as we turn to the texts for today and reflect on the theme of this year’s General Synod gathering: “Making all things new.” The very notion of “Making all things new,” can seem exhausting. And instead of inspiring hope, joy, and excitement it often reminds us how weary we are again. Which is the exact opposite of the intent. But we all know that ‘new things’ take more effort and energy than old things. That’s just a fact! Lori even included some ‘new things’ in the list of reasons we’re so tired:

* Learning new technology, or
* Starting a new diet and exercise plan, or
* Establishing a new healthy habit, or
* Making new friends,
* Starting a new job, or
* Taking on new responsibilities at school or work.

GENERAL SYNOD REVIEW

New things take effort and energy that oftentimes, we don’t have or struggle to muster. And yet, throughout our meetings, worship services and ministry report at General Synod we heard again and again how ordinary people, in ordinary churches with ordinary energy-levels, across the whole country are looking out into their communities and are being moved to action as they witness the weariness of others.

Now, there may be a whole host of reasons why weary people want to help other weary people, but I want to suggest that it is because God is up to something. God is stirring people’s hearts, God is expanding people’s capacity for love, compassion, patience, and justice. God is already present *and* moving *and* in the business of ‘making things new.’ And people of faith, who are attentive to the suffering of others, can sense that. Who look out into the world and are moved by the suffering of others, precisely because they are motivated by a Divine vision, a Divine promise that says, “things don’t have to be this way.”

And so let me give you my ‘6-word story’ for this week: Newness disrupts weariness, Divine possibilities emerge. Newness disrupts weariness, Divine possibilities emerge.

With each resolution passed at General Synod (I invite you to look them all up on the generalsynod.org website), the United Church of Christ sought to disrupt corrupt and oppressive systems that keep weary people trapped in cycles addiction, racism, and transphobia, or restricted people’s access to healthcare, quality education and clean and healthy environments. Each report given, each sermon delivered, each resolution presented, debated, and voted on…is an attempt by our denomination to bring about something new. To tap into a different way, to influence the outcome for the one suffering, to join with a purpose or a vision that is beyond us. To declare as a denomination that when we risk doing something new, something different, our tired efforts join with God’s and Divine possibilities emerge. Possibilities that, were it for our own effort and our own vision, could not happen.

We are a community of people who recognizes that God is on the move, God is still speaking…even while we are weary. As the prophet Isaiah observes, “See, I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth; do you not perceive it?”

LINK: MAIN POINT

So, this is the good news in God’s promise to make all things new. It doesn’t rely on us. It doesn’t rely on our vision, our energy, or our ability to push through. This is a part of *who* God is…continually opening up new possibilities that will alleviate human aimlessness and suffering.

OT TEXT & INTERPRETATION

We see this aspect of God’s character throughout the scriptures. Our first passage this morning is a word that came to the original audience while they were in exile—their past, a trail of broken dreams, disappointments, shame and horror, their present filled with the constant ache for home. Consumed by the past and present, I imagine there was little mental or emotional energy to think about the future. They were weary. It was enough just to get up in the morning and put one foot in front of the other. And into this situation, the prophet’s voice resounds, calling the people not to despair but to trust that new possibilities beyond their vision existed.

Why? Because the same God who brought this people out of the land of Egypt is not done with them yet. Their place of exile is not an end but rather, an opportunity for God to display Divine power and grace to them once again. The prophet’s vision is rooted in the memory of what God has done for Israel in the past, of God’s faithfulness to their ancestors. They know how God orchestrated the release of the Hebrew people from the tyrannical grip of the Pharaoh, how God led them into the wilderness and cared for them, and how, beyond all that is humanly possible, God parted the sea to allow them to cross, ensuring for them safe passage. God heard their weary cries, saw their oppression, and responded with justice and compassion, meeting them in the darkest of places not just to rescue them from slavery but to adopt them as God’s own. “See, I am about to do a new thing…do you not perceive it?”

Newness disrupts weariness, Divine possibilities emerge.

CONCLUSION

This is a sacred narrative that they would return to often to remind them of God’s faithfulness and of those Divine possibilities that interrupt our weary thinking. It is a narrative that millennia later, we can return to. The newness of God’s work has never been confined to a historical moment in time but is a cosmic event turning formless chaos into a place that is safe and supports life. Streams of water will replenish the earth and the old order of things will pass away.

This new thing that we are asked to perceive is reminiscent not just of the exodus then, but of creation itself, of new creation, of God preparing the world to be a place for human beings to live, flourish, in harmony with others and with their Creator. This is at the very core of who the UCC understands itself to be. This is the new thing that we are invited to be a part of. So, bring your whole self, no matter how tired, broken and depleted you feel. For it is God that is doing something new, and we are only asked to perceive it, to notice it and join in what God is already doing.

And so let our prayer be, that:

Newness disrupts weariness, (so that) Divine possibilities emerge.