

## ALL THINGS NEW



**Scripture:**

**John 13**

31. When he had gone out, Jesus said, ‘Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him.
32. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once.
33. Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, “Where I am going, you cannot come.”
34. I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.
35. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.’

**Revelation 21**

1. Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.
2. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.
3. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them;
4. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.’
5. And the one who was seated on the throne said, ‘See, I am making all things new.’ Also he said, ‘Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.’
6. Then he said to me, ‘It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life.



### ALL THINGS NEW

Most of you have probably seen the greeting cards, dishtowels, magnets and other items that memorialize the lifestyles of the 50s with humorous and very sarcastic observations. One of my favorite lines is called “Housewives in Hell,” which depicts women in the kitchen looking blissfully happy as they gaze at food they’ve prepared, or appliances. I have a postcard that’s been on my refrigerator since my kids were quite young, with an aproned facsimile of my mom looking with satisfaction at her Frigidaire door; the caption reads, ‘She finally figured how to control her children.’

From inside the refrigerator are two word balloons, one saying, “MOTHER, we’re out of peanut butter *again!*” and the other, “Mommy, can I have a sweater?” Fortunately, I never had to resort to that parenting technique.

### INNOCENCE AND IDEALISM

Because I spent a small portion of my childhood in that decade, (hard as that may be to believe!), I am hugely relieved that these jokes exist. I know that the 50s were not nearly as idyllic as “Leave it to Beaver” would have us believe. And yet, we do still yearn for the

innocence and idealism of those days, when both babies *and* the economy were booming.

Recalling that time, when church attendance was much more the norm, there's a magnet I have given to a couple of clergy friends. It shows a fresh-faced man with suit and tie, earnestly looking into the face of a slightly larger-than-life, white-robed Jesus as they walk through green pastures. His plea is, "Please, Jesus, protect me from your followers!" (Now why would my clergy friends find that amusing, I wonder?)

### **THE STUFF IN RED LETTERS**

I wish I had a dollar for every time someone has expressed that kind of sentiment to me. I think of Lucy, from Peanuts, shouting, "I love mankind, it's PEOPLE I can't stand!" We hear it often from those who can't stand church, or churchgoers. Most recently I have told you about the Jewish disc jockey in Texas who said he wasn't sure about the Christian Bible, but he really liked all the stuff in red letters! In other words, I love Jesus and all that he taught. It's Christians I can't stand! Why is that? It's because we so often fail to put others in mind of Jesus and his love. Today I offer encouragement from Jesus, from the early church, and from a vision of the future, to help us love one another, and to stay open to God's Spirit blowing in new ways.

### **JESUS SHOWS US HOW TO LOVE**

So here we have Jesus, in his last days, washing the disciples' feet before celebrating his last supper with them. As we pick up the story line, he has just sent Judas away to do quickly what he must do. In effect, Jesus has sealed his fate by putting the killing machine in motion. Hence, the Son of Man is glorified. Jesus has set his will to do what God has set before him, even if he later prays that the cup may pass. As he spends some final hours with his closest friends, he shows them love by serving them. At his most tender, he explains, "Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me..." Of course they will look for him. He who caused them to drop everything and follow, in places they

could not foresee, by the sheer force of his invitation. He who broke their stereotypes: healing on the Sabbath, overturning the temple systems and structures along with the moneylenders' tables, welcoming anyone without sin to cast the first stone at an adulteress.

Of course they will look for him, the one who took their old lives and gave them wholly new ones, albeit ones they could not fathom. Of course they will look for the one who took them as flawed, dense, competitive, fractious, impetuous individuals and made of them a new community, the community of the beloved, the community of the Way. But they can't follow him right at the moment. They need to live the adventures before them that will pull everything into perspective. And for this impending time of their lostness-without-him, Jesus gives a new commandment, one which is not exactly new, but newly contextualized by the foot-washing. Love one another in THIS way, he says, the way I have just embodied for you.

### **THIS NEW COMMANDMENT TO LOVE**

The newness of the commandment is all about breaking through the hitherto sacrosanct boundaries of chosenness and acceptableness, which felt safe and comfy, but which were ultimately false. Evidently, humankind had progressed to a point where commandments and law, as they were being kept by God's people, were not manifesting the fullness of God's mercy and love. One way this becomes clear to me is by revisiting the Lutheran Formula of Concord, from the year 1577. This document helpfully points out three uses of law, which are summarized in Wikipedia as:

- 1) to restrain external evil, as in civil use;**
- 2) to show us our sin as a mirror might, in order to teach or convict us;**
- 3) to show us God's character and will as a rule and guide to holy living, empowered by the Gospel alone, in order to instruct, guide and govern our behavior.**

## **JOHN CALVIN'S VIEWS OF THE LAW**

This third use is associated especially with John Calvin, the former lawyer-turned-reformer, who had articulated these three uses twenty years before the Book of Concord was published.

While I notice that the first two uses of law are sort of *negative* in orientation, like many of the Ten Commandments, I, like Calvin, have always loved this third use, which seems as positive in tone as Jesus' own commandment to love. If we were only disposed, as followers of Jesus, to be governed by this third way! In other words, were we able to be conformed to God's character and will, with lives empowered by the Gospel alone, well then, I doubt if anyone would be asking Jesus for protection from those of us who follow him. As it is, we are sometimes more obnoxious than unbelievers.

### **JESUS CAME TO FULFILL THE LAW**

Let me ask a question: when Jesus gave a "new commandment," what happened to the other ones? Jesus came, he said, not to abolish the law, but to fulfill it. Now, I think we can take the lens of the love commandment and look back to the Ten Commandments, and we find that none of them is negated by this new one. Another way of looking at the whole issue is to see how it functions in practice, as Jesus explodes the expectations that his Jewish contemporaries held. For instance, they thought he was going to be a military savior, to release them from the oppressive occupying Roman forces. But no, he rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday as the Suffering Servant, the man of sorrows, one who rode on in majesty to die, not to conquer in the usual sense but in a completely new sense. Behold, God was doing a new thing, and they did not perceive it!

### **WHAT HAPPENED AFTER JESUS CRUCIFIXION?**

So when Jesus died, what then? Probably the disciples thought it was a good ride while it lasted, but it was over now, and sooner or later they'd have to return to their former gigs. But it

didn't quite happen that way. Somehow, Jesus reappeared to them and began to strengthen them with the Holy Spirit.

**Somehow, the disciples re-assembled in Jerusalem, along with devout Jews from many other countries, and the Holy Spirit was poured out upon them all in such a new way, that they formed a cohesive movement that became the church.**

**They loved each other so well that many, many wanted a piece of that action.**

Soon it became clear that they could fit within the boundaries of traditional Judaism no longer.

### **MIRACLES AFTER PENTECOST**

In fact, right after Pentecost, Peter and John were healing, teaching, getting sprung miraculously from jail in order to minister in Jesus' name, just as if they were newly reborn. Unusual people were added to the community of followers: Samaritans were both converted and baptized, an Ethiopian eunuch was led to saving knowledge of Jesus through Philip's ministry, and before long their arch-enemy, Saul, had his Damascus Road encounter with the risen Christ. Those who were loved into the movement required ever-new definitions of inclusion.

### **GENTILES HEARD THE GOOD NEWS**

The unthinkable happened when Peter received a confusing vision with a triple command to eat animals that had long been considered unclean; immediately three men appeared and the Spirit instructed him to go with them to the home of their master, Cornelius, a devout, God-fearing man who also happened to be a Roman centurion. Before you knew it, Gentiles like Cornelius heard the good news, commenced to believe in Jesus, received the gift of the Holy Spirit and were baptized. You can bet Peter reported VERY carefully on that mind-blowing development, just as it is

over-reported in the book of Acts. Having embraced even Gentiles into this iconoclastic Way, it is small wonder that the group soon won its new name, Christians (or, “little Christs”), and a new world religion was born.

There is only so much change we can experience before something’s gotta give. We have this tendency to circle the wagons, hunker down, hang on to the status quo for dear life. And then along comes a vision of the future that makes our hearts leap. Consider the revelation: a new heaven and a new earth; a holy city coming out of heaven from God, as appealing as a bride on a wedding day. Hear the voice from the throne, “See, the home of God is among mortals, he will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.” Finally, hear the one seated on the throne say, “See, I am making all things new.”



### **THE LORD’S SUPPER**

There is nothing that lies beyond God’s power to make it new. No physical earth, no government, no religion, no church, no way of doing things, and certainly no relationship is outside of the scope of God’s grace and mercy. When Jesus gave that new commandment, he also instituted a new way of communing together, with a meal that we call the Lord’s Supper. Each time we celebrate this communion, we remember Jesus on that night; and we take part in the reality of that new heaven and new earth. Even here and now, the one on the throne is at work, making all things new. Amen.

**Rev. Kate Clayton**  
**Presbyterian Church of the Roses**  
**2500 Patio Court**  
**Santa Rosa, CA 95405**  
**May 6, 2007**