



## “The Search for Something New”

Texts: Ecclesiastes 1:2-9 and 2 Corinthians 5:17-20

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The excitement has been building for weeks and even months. Tomorrow is the “Great American Eclipse” and the reason it is called that is that while solar eclipses happen about every 18 months somewhere on the planet, this eclipse will traverse the continental United States, beginning in Oregon and traveling across the country to South Carolina. The last time an eclipse traveled a similar path across the United States was 99 years ago. It is estimated that as many as 12 million people live in the path of totality – where the darkness will be the most intense – and that they will be joined by nearly 7.5 million more visitors for tomorrow’s eclipse.

The demand for solar eclipse viewing glasses has far outpaced the supply. Those traveling to the path of totality are advised to take extra food and water, as traffic could be a nightmare. Gas stations are positioning extra tankers in strategic locations to insure an adequate supply of fuel is available to enable the visitors to return home. And, according to Space.com, somewhere around \$700 million in lost productivity will be incurred tomorrow.

All things being considered, tomorrow there will be something new under the sun.

When you go to back to the rich wisdom tradition of the Old Testament, you find what one of my friends calls, “the common sense of the Bible.” Sometimes the wisdom literature reads like an advice column in a magazine or newspaper. Sometimes they are pithy little sayings that you might expect to find in a fortune cookie. But, all in all, they make us think and ponder and brood over their words.

The book of Ecclesiastes is such a wisdom book. We don't know who wrote it, or really even when. The only name we are given is Koheleth and that simply means "teacher." About the content of the book there is disagreement. Some say the book is deeply pessimistic. Others say it affirms the goodness of life. But whatever road you choose to travel, the words of Ecclesiastes quite often simply speak great truth.

And that is particularly true of the passage from Ecclesiastes we heard again this morning:

All streams run to the sea, but the sea is not full;  
the place where the streams flow, there they continue to flow.  
All things are wearisome; more than one can express;  
the eye is not satisfied with seeing, or the ear filled with hearing.  
What has been is what will be,  
and what has been done is what will be done;  
there is nothing new under the sun.

We know that feeling. We've seen the bumper stickers that, in various ways, communicate that message. There are times when life seems to be little more than a repeat of the day before – a cycle of déjà vu.

We know that life can be monotonous. We know that life can be repetitive and tedious. We are accustomed to a certain measure of boredom and dullness. We confess that too often we simply go through the motions of life, rather than break out of the comfort of complacency.

And when we are faced with disappointment and disillusionment, we simply remind ourselves that "there is nothing new under the sun." When we see hatred and violence played out on the news, we tell ourselves it's always been that way. When we see prejudice and bigotry on display, we tell ourselves some people have always practiced intolerance and discrimination. When we see the poor passed by, we join with the multitude in misquoting Jesus, and remind ourselves that "the poor we will always have with us."

We listen to our friends and colleagues, our family members and acquaintances bewail and bemoan the world and its conditions and it is difficult to refrain from joining in. We all know that we live in a time when pessimism and cynicism are spreading like wildfire. The gloominess and dreariness of the day swallows up any hope and optimism there may be. We seem to live in a world in which "the path of totality" is everywhere.

Maybe old Koheleth was right. Maybe "there is nothing new under the sun." Maybe what is what will be and there is no sense in looking for something new.

But, if we are willing to accept that rather dismal proposition, what are we to do with these words:

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation  
everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new?  
Do we still believe that a life lived in God, in the example of Jesus Christ, can bring something new into the world? Do we still believe that whatever

the past's disappointments and failures may be, that they can be locked away and that God can open the door to a new beginning in every life?

When you look around at the world and its problems, could any of those problems be lessened or made smaller by a few more people believing that God is still capable of making a difference in the hearts and minds of those who harbor hatred and practice prejudice? Could it be that if a few more people, who bear the name of Jesus Christ, practice a little more love, a little more compassion, a little more understanding – could it be that the world might take notice? Could it be that if a few more of God's people exalted in truth, delighted in hope, and freely shared the love they themselves have received, that the world would be a bit more hungry for something new?

Central to the Christian faith is the very idea that God can make all things new, and that if we give ourselves to the life Jesus Christ came to pioneer, we are made new as well. You can call it “being born again.” You can call it “being justified.” You can call it “getting saved.” You can call it what you want – but at the heart of the good news of the Christian tradition is the central message that we are made new and we live a new life.

Look at the people who have experienced that “something new” for themselves. Francis was a rich young man, with a profitable future before him. But, rather than take over his father's business and have the creaturely comforts that life would bring, he became a beggar and established a religious order that focuses on simplicity and care. You can hear the “something new” in the words of the prayer attributed to him:

Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace;  
where there is hatred, let me sow love;  
where there is injury, pardon;  
where there is doubt, faith;  
where there is despair, hope;  
where there is darkness, light;  
and where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master,  
grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;  
to be understood, as to understand;  
to be loved, as to love;  
for it is in giving that we receive,  
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,  
and it is in dying that we are born to Eternal Life.

Those are words that can be honestly and authentically spoken only by one who has given herself or himself over to something beyond themselves. They are words that grow out of a heart and spirit that believes that God can still do something new. They are sentiments and aspirations that are rooted in the good news of God's love, grounded in the life of Jesus Christ, and are made evident in the new life that comes through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Against the cynicism and pessimism of the day, when all around we hear that “there is nothing new under the sun,” the good news of Jesus Christ still proclaims that a new creation is possible. In the face of the despair and despondency that greets us with every sunrise, the good news is that there is a better way – a way filled with hope and joy – and it is found in God’s love made known in Jesus Christ. Despite the proliferation of hatred and violence, the rise of anti-Semitism and anti-Islamic speech and the degradation of religious places, the good news of the gospel is that “love never ends” and that God is making all things new and that, one day, “The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them.”

Friends, there is something new under the sun. “...If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new.” That is good news! For now and evermore. Amen.



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