

“God Is Doing a New Thing in You”

One day, Euni and I saw a new housing development high in the mountains near Highway 15. Naturally, we expected it to offer a great view, and I was curious about what unique features the homes might have. We had to drive quite a distance just to reach the summit, where we found a gated entrance with a security guard.

Unexpectedly, we were turned away. It turned out that a reservation was required to view the model home—and to make that reservation, we had to prove an annual income of over \$300,000. All we were given was a brochure.

Euni and I looked at each other in disappointment and frustration as we turned the car around and headed back down the mountain road. Why were we so upset? Because we weren't accepted as we were—according to the terms set by the owner.

In 700 BC, the prophet Isaiah proclaimed in chapter 43 of his book that God would do a new thing. At the time, this prophecy pointed to the liberation of Israel and, ultimately, to the redemption of the world. But for those who heard it, it must have felt like a distant dream.

However, Jesus was born just as Isaiah had prophesied. He proclaimed the good news of God's kingdom for three years. And now, as we see in today's Gospel reading from John, the time of Jesus' sacrificial death—the moment of salvation—was drawing near. John notes that it was “six days before the Passover.” At last, the “new thing” God had spoken of long ago through Isaiah was about to become reality.

New things always bring hope and excitement. But sometimes, the moment we receive something new, it quickly loses its novelty and becomes ordinary. That's why our thirst for “new things” never ends. But the things of this world can never truly satisfy the deep longing within us.

So how can we solve this dilemma? The answer is this: God, the eternal Creator, transforms His people into new beings. And a new being can do new things. Through today's passages from both the Old and New Testaments, let's explore who can become the protagonists of God's new work.

First, those who live with hope in God's promises become new beings.

Isaiah's message is one of hope—hope that brings about the new thing for God's people. As I read this passage, I reflected on the idea of “hope beyond hope.” In verse 18, it says, “Do not cling to the events of the past or dwell on what happened long ago.” We've all heard similar advice before, encouraging us to let go of painful memories or past regrets.

But the events mentioned in verses 16 and 17 aren't negative—they describe the miraculous deliverance of Israel through the Red Sea. Why, then, would God ask His people not to dwell even on such amazing past victories? Because what God had planned next was even greater.

And what were these greater things? First, it was Israel's return from Babylonian exile. Second, it was the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, who died on the cross to set the world free from the power of sin and death. This is the plan and blessing God offers to all who believe in Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Bungee jumping and skydiving are known for their thrill and excitement. Has anyone here tried both and can say which is more exhilarating? I once had to parachute from a plane during my mandatory military service in Korea. The training I received to parachute was horrendous. But one thing is clear: the higher the drop, the greater the thrill.

In the same way, the new things God prepares for His people are more exciting and joy-filled than any past event we might hold onto. Israel's slavery in Egypt and exile in Babylon symbolize the bondage we all experience because of sin.

Imagine how joyful the Israelites must have felt when they were finally set free! In the same way, when we are freed from the chains of sin by the power of Jesus' blood, we, too, experience that same joy and freedom.

The Israelites' liberation from Egypt and Babylon took place in history. Our redemption through Jesus Christ has also already been accomplished. In the same way, the second coming of Christ is sure to happen. Therefore, let us hold firm to our faith and remain steadfast in our hope, trusting in God's promises and in their fulfillment.

Secondly, those who are responsive to Jesus' plan become new beings.

Let's turn to the Gospel of John. John 12:1 begins with the words, "Six days before the Passover..." Before His crucifixion, Jesus left Jericho early in the morning in the month of Nisan (March–April on our solar calendar), on the 8th day—likely a Friday. That afternoon, He arrived at the home of Lazarus in Bethany, near Jerusalem.

On the Sabbath (which began at sundown on Friday), Jesus spent time with Lazarus's family. Then after sundown on Saturday, a banquet was held—that's the setting of today's passage. And the next day, Sunday, He would enter Jerusalem. That day is what we now call Palm Sunday.

Mary's anointing of Jesus took place before Passion Week began. At that time, no one fully understood that Jesus' crucifixion was imminent. But we know that Mary had a deep desire to listen to Jesus. So, in today's reading from John, she becomes the protagonist—someone transformed into a new being in Christ.

That evening in Lazarus's house, the final moments of Jesus' life on earth were drawing near. The most transformative moment in the history of the universe was coming. And yet, just like His quiet arrival at birth, His death approached unnoticed and unprepared for. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus had already hinted at His death and resurrection three times. But His disciples didn't grasp it. They didn't remember.

And yet—an unknown woman responded. She became part of Jesus' redemptive plan, and her act of faith made her name known throughout history. She brought honor to the name of the Lord.

In verse 7, Jesus says, "She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial." He wasn't simply defending her from Judas Iscariot's complaint. He spoke this because He saw and understood Mary's heart and intention.

I believe Mary, who loved listening to Jesus, somehow recognized the timing of His mission. She took on a prophetic role, similar to that of John the Baptist, by preparing the way for Jesus' crucifixion.

The perfume Mary used was 12 ounces of pure nard, a fragrant oil from a flowering plant. It was worth a year's wages for a laborer—what we might estimate today as around \$31,800. It was like washing Jesus' feet with hundred-dollar bills.

I like to describe her act as "holy wasting." To me, holy wasting is a declaration to the Lord: "Everything I have is Yours." We don't know whether those 300 denarii were all that Mary possessed. But such a costly offering could only come from confirmed, unshakable faith.

Do we need to do the same? Is extravagant giving the only way to prove our faith? Probably not. Because such acts aren't really for God's benefit—they're more for our own souls. That's why I call it "holy wasting." It's about having the resolve to live not according to our own needs, but according to Jesus' needs. To live that way, we need spiritual resolve.

The "new thing" God promised through Isaiah is fulfilled in Jesus' soul-saving ministry and His crucifixion. And that crucifixion was first anticipated and honored by Mary, who met Jesus' need through her "holy wasting." No one forced her. But when Jesus' grace filled her heart, she freely poured out the perfume to prepare Him for burial.

Do I still think about that luxury housing complex that once rejected us? Not at all. Because Jesus Christ has already done a new thing in me—He has saved me.

Still, as long as we live on this earth, it's natural for us to continue hoping for new things: new health, new food, new joy, new investments, new journeys, a new home, new faith, new service, new fellowship—the list is endless. We all know the emptiness that comes when our desire for new things fades away. So how do we carry on when our physical abilities and knowledge begin to diminish?

Here's the good news: We don't have to keep chasing the "new things" of the world. Because now is the time when we can learn more deeply what truly matters. Now is the time when we can understand and enjoy the eternal value of life with God.

2 Corinthians 4:16 and 5:17 tell us: "We do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day... If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!"

Your age doesn't matter. We all have the duty and the privilege of walking with Jesus—today, tomorrow, and every day. And the Holy Spirit, in its wisdom, will continue working in us day by day to bring forth new things we never even dared to imagine.
Amen.

Reflections and Applications for Today's Sermon:

1. What are you asking God for today in hope, remembering His promises to His children? How is that hope shaping your transformation into a new person?
2. Take time to meditate and pray about what God may be planning for the future transformation of WCUMC during this season. How does that vision stir and energize your soul?
3. Remember, "holy spending" for Jesus Christ isn't limited to financial giving. Consider how you can practice holy spending through your time, gifts, and life circumstances—whether at WCUMC or in the Wrightwood community. What is one intentional act of "holy spending" you can begin this week?