

“We Had Hoped”**North East United Methodist Church****2nd Sunday of Easter****April 8, 2018****Rev. Dr. Drew M. Christian**

Habakkuk 1:5

The LORD replied,

***“Look around at the nations;
look and be amazed!
For I am doing something in your own day,
something you wouldn’t believe
even if someone told you about it.***

Jeremiah 29:11

For I know the plans I have for you,” says the LORD. “They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.

Isaiah 43:19

***For I am about to do something new.
See, I have already begun! Do you not see it?
I will make a pathway through the wilderness.
I will create rivers in the dry wasteland.***

.....

God is ready to do a “New Thing” – a “new thing” in each of your lives...it doesn’t matter how old you are...how young...how rich...how poor...how good...how lost...how long you’ve been a Christian...how short a time you’ve known Jesus...

God is ready to do a “New Thing” – “*something you wouldn’t believe*” – “*to give you a future and a hope*” – “*Do you not see it?*”

Unfortunately, many times we are afraid to allow God to do a “New Thing” in our lives.

Carole Lewis writes, “*Many years earlier, I had given my life to Jesus Christ and I called him Lord, but in reality, I had no idea how to let God be the Lord of my life. How could I give my life to God when I had been running it on my own for so many years? God was to answer my question a couple weeks later when our pastor preached a sermon on the will. He said, ‘You might be here this morning and you know God wants to change your will. God will not come in and work on your will without your permission.*

If you will just pray this prayer this morning: 'Lord, I'm not willing, but I'm willing to be made willing,' then God will have permission to work on your will.'

That Sunday morning...I prayed, 'Lord, that's where I am today. I'm scared to death of what you might do with my life if I give you control of every part. But it can't be any worse than the way it is right now. My family is in a terrible mess and I feel like I'm such a mess spiritually and emotionally. So I give you permission to work on my will.' Then I tacked a PS onto my prayer: 'And please, God, don't let it hurt too much.'

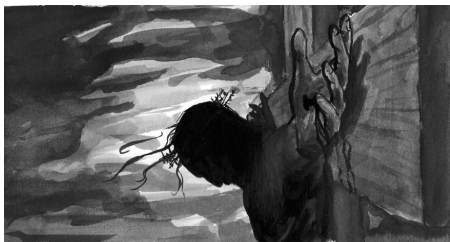
*In my mind, if someone was at the center of God's will, it had to be painful. For me the most painful choice would be if God sent me to Africa or China, since I certainly didn't want to go there. While I had no idea where God would take my simple prayer, I had found the key to change. **I was willing to be willing.**"*

Are you willing to be willing? Are you willing to allow God to move in your life...to move in the life of our church...and do a "New Thing"?

Unfortunately, many times we have a concept in our heads...in our minds...as to what the "New Thing" God is going to do will look like...we think we have it figured out...

Read Luke 24:13-35

Jesus has been arrested, crucified...



...He has died on a cross and been laid in a tomb. The disciples, His friends, are despondent. Their faces downcast. They have heard the "idle tale" of the women who visited the tomb and found it empty. They have witnessed the dramatic events of the last week. The road to Emmaus from Jerusalem is seven miles, a long enough walk to relive days past.

Someone falls into step with the disciples and asks them what they are discussing.



The disciples tell the story about, their experience with Jesus of Nazareth. They do not know that this is the risen Christ who walks beside them. At one point the disciples say, *“...but we had hoped that He was the one who was going to redeem Israel.”*

“...but we had hoped...”

The two traveling on the road...



...to Emmaus said, *“We were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel.”* Jesus had died...they had *“hoped”* that Jesus was the one to *“redeem Israel”* – they had hoped that Jesus was the one to be King...to be the Savior...



...conqueror...the One to defeat the oppressor...

“They had hoped...” But Jesus did not fulfill the picture they had of a King...a Savior...a Redeemer...Jesus, instead, had been arrested, beaten, did not put up a fight, and bore the nails of a Roman cross...



...this could not be the Messiah...Jesus could not be the Savior...the two traveling said, *“We were hoping...”*

Because God did not work in the way the two disciples had figured...it certainly could not have been God working...Because Jesus did not conquer their oppressor as the two disciples had imagined...He certainly could not be the Messiah...Because our lives are being led down a different path...



...than we had planned...it certainly can't be God directing us...

One example of this comes to mind...when I was serving Gethsemane UMC in Seaford, Delaware...for a decade a group of faithful Christians met at Gethsemane and prayed for revival...they prayed that the church would be full of children and young people...they prayed that God would move in a mighty way...

God did move...but not in the way many expected...

God moved Gethsemane UMC to become a contemporary church...and the pews exploded with people as Gethsemane became one of the fastest growing churches in our Conference in bringing people in on Profession of Faith...less than a dozen children grew to over fifty children running around forcing us to turn a third of the Fellowship Hall into a Children's area...once we had Disciple I...now Disciple I, II, III, IV, and Youth Disciple were all going on simultaneously, along with dozens of small groups...the praise band and congregation became more diverse with black and white worshipping together...people enjoyed drinking a cup of coffee in church as they listened to the message...moms and dads who had rushed out of the house were able to feed their children breakfast when they got to church...Many people were coming to know Jesus...

But several of the people who had prayed for the pews to be full were no longer there to greet the newcomers and to get to know them...several of the people who had prayed for children to be running around were no longer there to help raise them...why? Because the way God decided to move at our church did not look like what they had hoped...what they had pictured...

I've experienced this in my own life. I remember getting the phone call to leave Gethsemane and go to Rock Hall, Maryland. Deb and I jumped in the car and drove and drove and drove. We turned on to Rock Hall Road, drove by fields of geese, and came into the small, waterman's town.



We visited the three churches...each one smaller than the last...beautiful stained glass surrounded by a town suffering economically...the glory day of the waterman long past...

Driving back home that night, I began struggling. This could not be where God was sending me. I was pastoring a large church...a new building...a growing church of over 300 people...a church that hosted workshops to help other churches...now God was sending me to a three-point charge...three churches each over a century old...in a town, literally, “at the ends of the earth?”

I got discouraged. This couldn’t be God’s plan. I called my District Superintendent, Bill Sterling, and told him about how I was struggling with this call, the possibility of going to this new appointment in Rock Hall, after all I had experienced and accomplished with God’s help in Seaford. The DS sensed that I was really struggling with God on this move and gave me extra time...after another phone call a couple days later...more extra time...over a week I prayed and struggled about this move...Deb and I finally felt God say that we had to trust Him...if we were wrong to go, God would know we were going with the right motivation...we were trying to obey Him...serve Him...and God would turn what may not have been intended into something “good”...but if we failed to go and it was God’s call, His will, we would miss out on His blessings...we would miss out on our family being in the center of His will. So we went.

And it was a tremendous culture shock and adjustment. The nearest Walmart was an hour away. But God changed our lives. Looking back we can see why God called us to Rock Hall and how God used that appointment to bless our family. It was in Rock Hall Nate took over the praise band and grew in his music and calling to lead worship. It was in Rock Hall, when Deb and I were teaching *Experiencing God*, I felt led and was encouraged to go back to school and begin my doctoral work in leadership. It was my experience in Rock Hall, helping three churches work together collaboratively in ministry and mission, which became the motivation for my thesis. Even the hardships we faced there helped us to become stronger, to grow closer as a family, and to be more prepared for when God called us to Rising Sun.

And the collaborative ministries and missions started...the people whose lives were changed by those ministries...And the friendships we developed. Not only would we have missed out on the many blessings God had for us...the many lessons God wanted to teach us...but we would have missed out on some very special and life-long friendships...and what about the many lives changed throughout the community of Rock

Hall...what if we had not gone...perhaps some of those who came to Christ, who were comforted, who experienced a deeper relationship with God, would have also missed out...

We almost missed out on everything God did in our lives over the four years we spent along the Chesapeake Bay in Rock Hall because God's plan, God's "*new thing*" in our lives, did not look like what we had hoped...what we had pictured...

"...but we had hoped..."

Because God did not work in the way the two disciples figured He would...Jesus certainly could not have been the Messiah. Because Jesus did not conquer their oppressor as the two disciples had imagined...Jesus certainly could not be the Messiah. Aren't there times we fall into the same trap, our thoughts similar to the disciples? Because our lives are being led down a different path that we had planned...because our things around us are looking different than we had pictured...we cannot bring ourselves to believe it is God moving in our midst.

A few years ago, I invited Rev. Herb Cain to speak at our Easter Sunrise Service; he spoke on John 20:1-18. It is Easter morning and Mary Magdalene visits the tomb and finds it empty.



As she stands there weeping outside the tomb, wondering where they have taken Jesus' body, she turns and Jesus is standing there. Except she doesn't know it is Jesus. She thinks it is the gardener.

Rev. Cain spoke of how perhaps she did not recognize Jesus because she wanted her "old" Jesus back. This was not the same Jesus who had walked with her and the disciples for three years. On earth Jesus walked with the disciples but now He has a new purpose. Jesus will ascend to His Father, and though no longer physically present, will send His Holy Spirit so that the whole world, not just the geographical area Jesus could travel to, could be touched by God.

Jesus does not come into our lives to take us "back" to where we once were, but to move us forward into "new" life...into "new" territory. Rev. Cain stated, "*New life doesn't mean 'resurrect our old life,' but instead it means getting something new, something different.*" Many times people are not open to what God is doing in their lives. We have our "preferences" of how things should be. In order to let go of our personal preferences it involves an "active surrendering," the kind Jesus spoke about. Jesus said, "**Whoever**

wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me"
(Matthew 16:24).

God said through the prophet Isaiah, *"For I am about to do something new. See, I have already begun! Do you not see it?"* (43:19). Is God ready to move in our church in a "New Way"...is God about to do a "New Thing" in our lives, in our family? Have we ever found ourselves holding God back because it doesn't look like what we picture God would do?

"But we've never done it that way?" Thank God that God did not say those words...

Can you imagine...sending His Son to die on a cross to take our place...to forgive us our sins..."*No, I can't do that...I've never done it that way..."*

If God had said those words, we would still be bringing cows and goats and turtledoves into the sanctuary and sacrificing them on the altar...we would still be imprisoned in our sin...we would not know the beauty of His love, the amazing grace that we sing about...

It is important to remember that God has a plan for our lives. As Henry Blackaby writes, ***"You cannot stay where you are and go with God."***

God created us with a purpose and His plan for us is *"good."* ***For I know the plans I have for you," says the LORD. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope."***

In fact, God's plan for our lives is *"perfect."* The Bible says, in Psalm 18:30, ***"As for God, his way is perfect. All the Lord's promises prove true. He is a shield for all who look to him for protection."***

As God continues to work in our midst, in our homes, in our church, in our lives...let us not miss the next thing He does because it doesn't look like what we pictured God doing or because it isn't really something that we prefer or because we had other plans in mind...let us *"be willing to be willing"*...surrender and allow God to walk alongside us, teaching and leading us, and eventually revealing Himself to us and to the world...

The Lord replied..."*For I am about to do something new. See, I have already begun! Do you not see it?"*

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