

I am about to create new heavens
and a new earth;
the former things shall not be remembered
or come to mind. *Isaiah 65:17*

New and Unknown

This very familiar passage from Isaiah is in the lectionary for this coming Sunday, and it's a good one for San Gabriel Presbytery as we look to the future.

It has always been presented as a very positive, hopeful prophecy. But I remember an Old Testament professor who confessed that she kind of liked things the way they were, or at least didn't hate them so much she wanted all the former things to be banished even from our memory! And I have often thought about how disorienting this new life in Christ can be, especially if you attempt to abandon all that was familiar for you in the past—and for some folks that isn't just bad habits or addictions, it may be toxic family members or friends who find your recovery to be threatening.

But almost by definition, the new life is unknown. You are the same person, but you're not. You're in the same place, but you see things differently, and your actions may be totally changed. My cousin once did a documentary that included, as I recall, an interview with a young woman who left her life as a drug dealer and had chosen to go straight. This is morally great news, but it meant that she lost the material wealth the drug dealing supplied, and ended up sleeping under a freeway overpass because she could not get a job that would enable her to pay her bills. Jesus warns us that following him does not protect us from difficulties or danger—in fact, we are warned that it can bring danger. And yet, we believe that following Jesus is the better way.

This coming Saturday is our year-end Presbytery meeting—have you registered yet? And the funny thing is, I am more unclear about what will happen in this meeting than nearly any other. We will have the standard year-end actions like electing new leaders and approving a budget for next year. But beyond that, I do not know what else will be announced. And no matter what, new leadership always presents change.

Of course, for many that change can be positive—refreshing at least, freeing for some, and maybe a needed correction! Adjusting to new leadership can be challenging, but it's always needed. We are not in the business of creating dynasties, and only God is unchanging—but God is so much greater than we can ever comprehend, we can change a million times and still be well within the wideness of God's creative genius.

The mistake would be to shrink back and try to hold on to what was familiar, or magnify the danger of an uncertain future. I am writing this column from Louisville. I got in at about 10:30 pm Louisville time (which is only 7:30 pm Pacific time), but that was 5 hours and several new routes later than I had planned. Peter Tan-Gatue is also here, because this is the annual meeting of midcouncil leaders. Peter was set to arrive when I was supposed to (it's too late for me to call and confirm), because he flew in from Ontario. Now I had a very bad experience with the Ontario Airport, so I have held on to my vow to never use them again—and see where that got me! But at least I was willing to try to fly here. This past week there was a flurry of emails from folks who decided to cancel their trip out of fear of the reduction in flights due to the government shutdown. I chose to come anyway because I have to

present a couple of times, and the ongoing multiple levels of uncertainty we've seen recently have left me a little fatalistic—after all, I can't imagine how crazy I'd be if I tried to control or predict every twist and turn in life! As it turns out, the reason for my flight delay was not the shutdown anyway, just a plain old regular mechanical glitch. And Southwest has confirmed that my flight home should go as scheduled (as well as airlines can predict, anyhow). I'm supposed to come home Wednesday night—let's hope I'm back by Saturday!

No matter our circumstance—whether dizzy from unplanned change or trapped in persistent mediocrity or suffering—there is only one thing of which we can be certain: the goodness of God, whose compassion and wisdom are far beyond our own. Let us give thanks for God's constant care through our lives, and look ahead with confidence.

See you Saturday,

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