Rev. Melanie – July 2023

As we have traveled together through these last three years, we have navigated many changes. At the beginning when you chose me as your pastor and I chose you as my congregation, we only really knew each other over the phone and Zoom and once in a while standing at a distance with masks on. Over time we have come back together more and more, and now we are able to be together in the same room, hold events and host events at the church, and visit one another in the same ways we could before the pandemic.

But everything isn't the same as it was. Many things have changed for the good but at the same time things have not "gotten back to normal." Why? I think "normal" is a moving target. Times are always changing but we don't always notice until something big happens that makes us look, and we have had many big things from a pandemic to fires to snow, and that doesn't even include new church leadership.

So what can we do? Isaiah reminds us that God is (always) about to do a new thing. This part of Isaiah was written while the people were in exile in Babylon hoping to go home one day soon, hoping to return to their normal lives. The writer knew that that day would come and was writing to keep the people's hopes up and to tell them that changes were coming.

We have big changes coming. Just as a few examples there are some new events coming in the fall--the Skyland Celebration on September 9, a new faith formation series, and a new youth service club. Each of these new things is an opportunity to show up together and to reach out into our community and show our neighbors who we are.

If you are worried that the church is aging and shrinking, now would be a good time to do something about it. I saw a statistic recently that said that 83% of people who visit a church do so because they were invited by a relative or friend. By contrast, 6% attended after being invited by the pastor. I do tell people about us and invite them to come to church. It's easy for me because people expect to hear it from me, and I know it is more challenging for you because the topic of religion is awkward today. That said, people are more likely to try us out if you invite them.

Each of these events coming up is a great opportunity to invite people to something that feels less imposing than Sunday worship (though absolutely invite people to worship also!), so tell your neighbors and your friends what we are about and what we are up to. Tell people that all are welcome no matter what. And let's really welcome people no matter what.