



SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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THE FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER, MAY 18, 2025
ACTS 1:1-18; PSALM 148; REVELATION 21:1-6; JOHN 13:31-35

SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW

***John 13:31-35** [At the last supper, when Judas had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."]*

It's no wonder I became an Episcopalian in college. I've never loved something just because it's new. I know a sales pitch when I see one. "New" often means something more disposable with a shorter shelf life. Personally, I treasure the Episcopal impulse toward tradition and its

horror of the trendy. Before I reveal too much of my inner curmudgeon though, I should get to my real question: Can God do something that's truly new?

God is supposed to be the constant amidst the mighty rivers of change. God is our rock, our anchor, the same

yesterday, today and forever. Don't we prefer our direction from God, or God's Son for that matter, to be rooted deeply in the wisdom of our ancestors? Yet in today's Gospel we have Jesus offering a "new" commandment. On one level, this is nonsense. Jesus was not the first to tell us to love each other. Way back in Leviticus, the crustiest of Old Testament books, we're told explicitly: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." What makes this new is the second part of the phrase: "just as I have loved you." In Jesus, we're given a new model for what unfiltered love looks like in a human life.

Just before today's words, for example, Jesus offers his disciples bread and wine and washes their feet. He knows that Peter will deny him in a few hours. He knows that Judas will betray him, and he shares his last meal with them and washes their feet anyway. We don't know what to do with a love this indiscriminate, that shows no concern for quality control – except maybe to enshrine it and

make it the property of Jesus, where it can't implicate us.

It's harder to distance ourselves from Peter, the subject of our reading from Acts. He's more like us. Yet he too experiences God doing something new and has to decide whether to hold onto the rock of what he's always known or let go and see where the river takes him. He sees a vision of a sheet coming down from heaven with clean and unclean animals. A voice tells him to eat. As a Jew, he's not wrong to object. Eating some of these animals would be a direct violation of Levitical law – the same book that tells us to love our neighbor, incidentally. But make no mistake – this vision is something new.

And the repercussions unfold immediately: he can't use words like "clean" and "unclean" to describe people anymore either. A group of Gentiles then asks Peter to go somewhere he's never gone before to people he's never met before – and with this vision to guide him, he goes. He's then able to see God's Spirit already moving among them, just as it

had earlier among his fellow Jews. If the Spirit of God isn't making distinctions between us and them (whoever us and them may be), then who are we to play Inspector General? Peter goes ahead and baptizes them, and in so doing, opens the floodgates of Christian community to all of us.

It can be hard for the rule followers among us to know what to make of this. How does a new vision stack up against centuries-old tradition? It helps that Peter isn't just going rogue here.

Other faithful folks witness the Spirit's movement and draw the same conclusions. Moreover, Peter is accountable to his community for his change of mind and heart; he's rightly asked to explain himself. Telling his story is part of how his community discerns theirs. He's part of a much larger stream now, and his experience helps to change the flow. His vision is also consistent with what he already knows about Jesus. Jesus didn't just tolerate the other –the marginalized and outcast; he asked if he could join them at their tables. He invited

traitors and deserters to join him for his final meal, and he washed their feet. Maybe what Peter experiences here isn't so much new as an outgrowth of what Jesus already reveals as true.

So then, can God do something new? You tell me. What has being part of this community at St. Mark's shown you about God's freedom to draw the circle wider? How have you embodied an old Scripture or song or ritual here and come to know Jesus or the Spirit's movement in a new, more generous way? What conversation partners have you had here that you might never encounter otherwise – in choir or a Radix group or around a table on Wednesday nights? How has a child or a teen or an adult here reflected a new image of God to you? What have you seen on a pilgrimage or retreat that you might never have seen if you stayed home? What has inspired you over livestream in worship or a forum to respond to injustice or care for God's creation in a new, more impactful way – because it's shared? How are people you know here

different – stronger, braver, more confident - because they know they're welcome here? How are you different? How has receiving bread and wine from this table or being baptized from that font helped you to see the Spirit moving out there among people who don't know they're welcome here yet? All of this is how God does new things – by making us new, by helping us tell our stories and test our visions in

community, by welcoming us into deeper streams of wisdom where we can help change the flow. We pray, we serve, we give here because we have found here that God is both the rock that anchors us and the river that carries us to where we'd never venture on our own. In the Name of the One whose unfiltered love reveals the beauty of both old and new – Amen.



Saint Mark's Cathedral lives in a grounded faith and spirituality; we seek to liberate people for ministry. We are grounded in ancient Christian scripture and tradition while at the same time remaining open to the insight and truth of contemporary life. You'll find Saint Mark's Cathedral actively involved in service and outreach to our community. Together we pray, worship, study the scriptures, and explore the richness of twenty-one centuries of Christian experience. Wherever you are on your journey of faith, you are welcome here!