

## Sermon for May 6, 2007: Making All Things New = Change

Acts 11: 1-18

Revelation 21: 1-6

John 13: 31-35

You may remember news reports that tell us that the single largest event that causes stress in our lives is, no surprise, death. But the event that is the second largest stressor is, interestingly enough, getting married. It's not the event of getting married itself, although that event can generate a lot of stress: stress about where to have the wedding, who will officiate, who will serve in the bridal party, what everyone will wear, where the reception will be, who will be seated with whom, how it will all be paid for. No, the stress is caused by all of the other changes that occur: possible name changes, changes in where people live, changes in how society relates to the married couple versus the two together who are not formally married, changes and adjustments in expectations, both spoken and unspoken expectations. Marriage is one way of making all things new. Marriage also causes changes. When things are made new, change occurs.

When God gave Peter the vision of welcoming uncircumcised men into fellowship with the followers of Jesus, it made things new, and change occurred. Before, there was a pretty sharp division between the Jews, including the followers of Jesus, and those who weren't Jewish. The Jews followed strict rules that laid out their behavior: what they would eat, how they would prepare food, how they would purify themselves if they became unclean because they had, purposely or not, somehow become unclean, who they would meet with, who they would eat with, whose houses and buildings they would enter, and whose they would not enter, so that they would not become ritually unclean. Most observant Jews avoided contact with non-Jews, Gentiles. There were some Gentiles who gave to the local synagogues, who observed some of the practices of the Jews, Gentiles like Cornelius, but those who refused to become circumcised and fully observant were, in the end, still sources of contamination. Entering their houses, sharing food with them, still was forbidden, because of the ritual contamination such contact would cause. Peter's vision caused him to decide to violate those rules, and instead to enter into full fellowship with these Gentiles, to the extent of not only entering Cornelius' house, and sharing food with the members of Cornelius' household, but to also acknowledging their baptism by the Holy Spirit. Peter's behavior at first got him into big trouble with the believers in Jerusalem – such huge changes seemed at first hearing to be totally unacceptable. But when Peter told his story, and they came to understand how **God** had moved to make all things new, they rejoiced in this change. Indeed, in this remaking of the relationship between Jew and non-Jew, in this culture-shaking event, making all things new HAD to create change, in almost every aspect of their lives, for both circumcised and uncircumcised believers.

At first glance, the new commandment that Jesus gave to His followers during the last supper does not seem to be a big change – love one another. But when we think about the call for new behavior, and the rationale behind it, we can see that this new commandment meant huge changes for the disciples: *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.* We have seen how the disciples jockeyed for power. We have seen their desire to be served, rather than to serve. Jesus is making all things new

here – instead of competition, the disciples are to show love for one another, to support one another, to encourage and build up one another, to serve one another, to be the last instead of the first. This is making all things new indeed – and this is a call for change, radical change, in the way they relate to one another, and in the way they relate to the world.

The passage from Revelation shows us what happens when all things are completely made new: the final separation between God and humanity will end, because God will once again dwell with us. Death will be ended, because the decay and the evil that causes death will be ended. There will be no more crying because there will be nothing to cry about. When all things are made new, huge changes will occur.

Even here, in this sanctuary, making virtually everything new has also introduced changes. There have been changes in the acoustics of this room because of the changes in the chancel design and the removal of the carpeting along the side aisles and the back. There have been changes in the light levels, making it easier to see. There have been changes in the places where people sit, because the location of the choir has changed. So some people are contemplating visits to the audiologist. Some people are able to read the pew bibles and to see the hymnals better, which allows more people to sing more. When people sit in a different spot in church, they meet other people whom they might otherwise not have the chance to visit with before or after the service. And so the congregation has the opportunity to get to know its various members better. Some of these changes are intentional; some are not. But in the course of making all things new, change must happen – it is unavoidable.

At the same time, we have certain core beliefs and behaviors that will not be shaken by change. The most important one is this: we believe that Jesus is Lord. Others include the belief in the loving nature of God, and that we can trust the Triune Godhead: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We believe that God shows us grace, a grace that we can never earn on our own, a grace that we can choose to receive with gratitude, or not. We still believe that as Christians we ARE called on to love one another with the same sort of self-giving love that Jesus showed to His followers, that Jesus shows to us. And we believe that when we do those things, that all things are indeed made new, which leads to the power to change the world, one person at a time.

When God makes all things new, change is inevitable. But when God makes all things new, we know that it is to renew the world, to renew us, to draw us into a closer relationship with God, and with one another. Those are changes that we can welcome, because even though we are taken out of our comfort zones, God is there to meet us, to wipe away our tears of frustration, of worry, of stress, of fear. If God is with us, who CAN be against us? Nothing in this world can separate us from the love of God we have available to us in Christ Jesus our Lord. So let us know that God is making all things new for us, and that we can release our anxiety and stress, because the changes that will happen as a result of this newness are changes that are filled with the Presence of God. So let us be still, and know that God is with us, and will be with us always, until Christ comes again. Let us rejoice, just as the ancient Christians in Jerusalem rejoiced when they had heard Peter's story, even though their own expectations had been turned upside down – because that turning led to the glorification of God. May we also be willing to have our own expectations be turned upside down, to the glorification of God. Even so, come soon, Lord Jesus. Amen.

## Communion

Hymn: RIL #67 – Be Thou My Vision, v. 1-3

Benediction Response: RIL #67 – Be Thou My Vision, v. 4

## Acts 11: 1-18

Now the apostles and the believers who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also accepted the word of God. So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him, saying, ‘Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?’ Then Peter began to explain it to them, step by step, saying, “I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. There was something like a large sheet coming down from heaven, being lowered by its four corners; and it came close to me. As I looked at it closely I saw four-footed animals, beasts of prey, reptiles, and birds of the air. I also heard a voice saying to me, ‘Get up, Peter; kill and eat.’ But I replied, ‘By no means, Lord; for nothing profane or unclean has ever entered my mouth.’ But a second time the voice answered from heaven, ‘What God has made clean, you must not call profane.’ This happened three times; then everything was pulled up again to heaven. At that very moment three men, sent to me from Caesarea, arrived at the house where we were. The Spirit told me to go with them and not to make a distinction between them and us. These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered the man’s house. He told us how he had seen the angel standing in his house and saying, ‘Send to Joppa and bring Simon, who is called Peter; he will give you a message by which you and your entire household will be saved.’ And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as it had upon us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ If then God gave them the same gift that He gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?” When they heard this, they were silenced. And they praised God, saying, “Then God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life.”

## Revelation 21: 1-6

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “*See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be His peoples, and God Himself will be with them; He will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.*”

And the One who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.” Also He said, “Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.” Then He said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life.”

John 13: 31-35

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.”