

**Catholic Church of the Beatitudes
Santa Barbara, CA**

Fifth Sunday of Lent—March 16, 2013

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Reflections on **Isaiah 43:16–21; Philippians 3:8–14; John 8:1–11**

*Forget the events of the past, ignore the things of long ago!
Look—I am doing something new!*

Don't you just love those words that the prophet Isaiah put into YHWH's mouth? Don't you especially love hearing them in our world today, with its huge problems of global warming and poverty and violence? It's exciting to hear those words.

Listen again:

*Look, I am doing something new!
Now it springs forth—can you not see it?
I am making a road in the desert and setting
rivers to flow in the wasteland...
I will put water in the desert
and rivers in the wasteland for my chosen
people to drink,
these people whom I formed for myself
so that they might declare my praise.*

Those are words that Isaiah wrote thousands of years ago; yet how they speak to us today, even quite literally. One of our current crises is the growing scarcity of safe drinking water around the world. And here we read “I will put water in the desert.” How do we understand that?

Yet, even more than safe drinking water, today we need hope and fresh thinking

and many more sincere, intentional connections with those sisters and brothers of ours right here in California and around the world who are suffering. We need to be part of the *Something New*. But how? How will we play a part?

St. Paul has something to tell us about that in the second reading. He says “I consider *everything* a loss in light of the surpassing knowledge of Jesus Christ, for whose sake I have forfeited everything. I count *everything else* as garbage, so that Christ may be my wealth—that I may be found in Christ, not having any justice of my own based on observance of the Law.”

Now as you know, before he encountered Christ, Paul was the *most observant* of Jews. He was an enforcer of the Law—that Law handed down by Moses and minutely parsed by generations of Jews since Moses. The requirements of the Law for daily practices and moral behavior were many and detailed. The punishments for failing to observe the Law were clear, and often extremely harsh.

But – God did something new for Paul. God knocked him off his horse, and sent him on a journey of evangelization. That

made all the difference for Jews and Gentiles of his time, and for all his descendants in the faith, up to and including us today. As a result of his new life, St. Paul declared, “All I want is to share in Christ’s sufferings by being formed into the pattern of his death.”

The pattern that led to Christ’s death was the Way of Jesus.

It was the Way he showed us how to live—the Way he showed us how to heal and treat one another, including our enemies. It was the Way Jesus knew God so much more intimately than any people up to his time could have imagined. The Way of Jesus was so different and so threatening to the people of his day and their Law, that they crucified him, nailing him to a cross.

Jesus’ Way—his behavior that so threatened the Mosaic Law—is exemplified by his response to the crowd gathered to punish the woman caught in adultery. The Law was clear that the punishment for adultery was stoning—for the woman who was caught, if not for the man. And the crowd gathered to righteously carry out the punishment.

Jesus didn’t directly speak to them about the crime. Instead he said, “Let the person among you who is without sin throw the first stone at her.” One by one, the crowd drifted away, without throwing a single stone.

How disorienting it must have been for the elders and Pharisees and other upstanding Jews to be put on the same footing as the adulterous woman. How dare Jesus do that! What a new thing *that* was!

So – not all things that are new are experienced as good, especially at first. Es-

pecially if they cause us to examine our own behavior, our own opinions, and our own judgments of who is good and who is not.

That was brought home to me pretty clearly last weekend at the Immaculate Heart Community Lenten Retreat. Our retreat leader was Jamie Manson, a thirty-something woman. Jamie is a Catholic, a writer on religious subjects, a lesbian in a committed relationship, a person who has been excommunicated several times, and she has a call to the priesthood. Jamie explained some of the things that puzzle us about her generation.

As I thought more about her teachings this week, it occurred to me that, once again, God is making something new. God is making new people for the world we have today. Here’s what I mean.

People who are in their teens, twenties and thirties we call the millennial generation. They’re different from most of us. They resist commitment; they don’t join churches or other religious institutions; they delay marriage or remain single; they delay having children, or don’t have them at all; they change homes and jobs and careers frequently; and they generally seem to be more rootless than those of us in older generations.

We see many problems on our Earth today. Those problems are huge, global—even cosmic—in scope. The people who are going to tackle those problems can’t be too tied to a particular location or job or situation, but will need to be flexible in their life choices. They will need to be tuned in—to have an understanding of what is going on around the world.

The problems we face are *big*. We can't begin to solve them unless everybody participates. That means everybody: men and women, heterosexuals and homosexuals, citizens and immigrants, liberals and conservatives—everybody. Millennials are comfortable with diversity of all kinds.

The problems we face need new tools, and people who know how to use them. That means communication tools and technologies of all kinds. We know who are adept in using them.

As Jamie spoke to us last weekend, she made it clear that millennials reject many of the verities and “laws” that those of us who are older cling to. And while those “laws” or conventions served us in our time, they are no longer adequate for the present.

Some of our cherished conventions and practices have gotten us into the very problems that need solving.

I'm talking about things like constant growth despite the consequences, our consumer society, and our failure to care for our home, planet Earth.

So – let us set aside our attachment to the things of long ago, and welcome the new things that God is bringing us today.

Let us rejoice in the new generation that God has created.

Let us offer what we can to those young people: encouragement, love, connection, and – if they wish – a community to touch into now and then.

Finally, let us discern, in the years that we have left, *our* place in God's new plan for this new Earth.