

## (WHO AM I?) ALL THINGS NEW

### Acts 11:1-18

#### Intro

So I had a moment on Monday morning. It sounded something like this, 'no way!'.

You see last week, in the midst of the sermon, I talked about how, once the disciples moved beyond the doors and began to become the hands, feet, and voice of Jesus, they did not always know what the God thing to do was. Meaning, that there were disagreements and moments the leadership of the early church began to second guess whether or not the direction that they decided to head was, in actuality, the direction that God would have them venture upon. One of the examples that I used: the kosher food laws.

Guess what showed up in the Lectionary this week (which I had not looked at prior to this Monday)? Peter talking with the rest of the leadership...about the kosher food laws! To which the moment of, 'no way!' emanated.

So, as we hear these words, I want you to realize that what these people were dealing with was a very real struggle. What they knew, what they had been taught, what was scriptural, was that in order to be a true and complete follower of God, you needed to adhere to the Jewish law, which absolutely talked about what you could and couldn't eat as well as how some of what you could eat needed to be prepared.

Now Jesus showed them that these laws were not hard and fast...but let's be honest, when you have generation after generation after generation that thinks and lives a certain way, stepping out of that stream will feel incredibly unfamiliar (in the least), if not out and out wrong. And what Peter is articulating is not just about the food: the food is the tip of the iceberg because what comes along with what he is saying is that you no longer need to be Jewish in order to be a faithful follower of Christ.

There are more than a few ways that this message still needs to be heard today...but will we listen? The scripture reads this way.

### **Acts 11:1-18**

11Now the apostles and the believers who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also accepted the word of God. 2So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him, 3saying, 'Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?' 4Then Peter began to explain it to them, step by step, saying, 5'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. 6As I looked at it closely I saw four-footed animals, beasts of prey, reptiles, and birds of the air. 7I also heard a voice saying to me, "Get up, Peter; kill and eat." 8But I replied, "By no means, Lord; for nothing profane or unclean has ever entered my mouth." 9But a second time the voice answered from heaven, "What God has made clean, you must not call profane." 10This happened three times; then everything was pulled up again to heaven. 11At that very moment three men, sent to me from Caesarea, arrived at the house where we were. 12The 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. 13He told us how he had seen the angel standing in his house and saying, "Send to Joppa

and bring Simon, who is called Peter; <sup>14</sup>he will give you a message by which you and your entire household will be saved.” <sup>15</sup>And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as it had upon us at the beginning. <sup>16</sup>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.” <sup>17</sup>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?’ <sup>18</sup>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**

### **Intro**

Our second passage comes to us from a letter that carries a whole lot of baggage for a whole lot of people.

However, instead of carrying any of this baggage, I encourage you to hear these words as an impressionistic painting of the things that are to come. The painting’s title? ‘All Things New’. The scripture reads this way.

### **Revelation 21:1-6**

<sup>1</sup>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. <sup>2</sup>And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. <sup>3</sup>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; <sup>4</sup> 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.’ <sup>5</sup> 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.’ <sup>6</sup>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.

### **‘(Who Am I?) All Things New’**

I mentioned a few weeks ago how Jen and I adventured into the city with Austin a few weeks ago. The way that we started the adventure off, was by heading across midtown from where we parked, to the Museum of Modern Art. To be perfectly candid, we weren’t sure how Austin was going to take to the place, so we had his iPad and headphones at the ready.

They never came out.

Once we purchased our tickets, we headed up to the fifth floor to see whatever was there to see. From color to shape to texture, the paintings pulled us in, admittedly, some more than others, but across the board, there was, at the very least respect, if not out and out awe.

And Austin had his own variation of that as well.

Every now and again we would be looking at a painting and he would hold his hands up like he was holding a camera, and say, ‘click!’, which was Jen’s cue to take a picture of that painting so that we could drop it on to his iPad for later viewing. From van Gogh, to Picasso, to Pollack, we were shown different

ways of seeing and feeling the world. Some of them we were able to get and resonate with. Others...not so much.

The reason that I bring up this story is because of that line from Revelation: 'See, I am making all things new!'

That is one of those statements that people love...when what is being made fits with their particular perspective of acceptable, let alone beautiful.

However, when that something new means that what you have grown to know and love is beginning to change, let alone being radically transformed...all of a sudden, we're not so comfortable with the whole 'new' thing: 'no thank You, God. Just leave it the way that we like it.'

Peter knew what he believed to be true. He had been raised by people who had been influenced by hundreds of years of trying to hold on to what they knew to be true because they knew that if they didn't hold on to it tightly, then it felt like the people of Abraham and Isaac and Moses would become nothing more than a footnote in the sands of time. Following the kosher food laws (as well as all of the other laws that helped to direct the Hebrew society) were not merely 'helpful suggestions', they were 'the ways' to keep people oriented toward God.

As the early church began to form, there really wasn't a question as to whether or not those who were led to profess their belief in Jesus as the Son of God would become Jewish. Jesus was Jewish. His disciples were Jewish. Kind of makes sense that those who would follow him after the fact would also be...Jewish, or at the very least, leaning toward adhering to the Jewish law.

And yes, Jesus pushed the boundary lines but he also stated very clearly that he came, not to destroy the law, but to fulfill it (Matthew 5:17).

That's the norm that the early leadership of the church is operating out of.

So imagine Peter's surprise when he receives the vision that he does of killing and eating the animals that are on that cloth, let alone his response when he is led to Caesarea from Joppa – a 40 mile trek – with the preface from the Spirit of God of, do 'not to make a distinction between them and us'. It's still them and us, but now there is no distinction.

Peter ends up being led into a space that he has to be incredibly uncomfortable in, confronted with the head of a household that tells him that an angel appeared and told him that a 'Peter from Joppa will bring a message that will save him and the entire household'.

Well, okay then.

Peter who has been ruminating on his vision for at least two days' worth of walking remembers what Jesus said and begins to understand just a little bit more clearly (for now we see through a glass dimly, but then we will understand fully...this is a stepping stone of Peter's 'understanding fully'), '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?' These are uncharted and uncomfortable waters.

'See, I am making all things new!'

We are the disciples and the disciples are us.

Can we say with unabashed clarity that we understand fully God's Word and all that the Spirit continues to whisper out into the midst of the world and our lives? Or that God has completed the process of making all things new?

I know that for me it feels like every time I get into God's Word, I learn something, or at the very least am reminded of something that I have forgotten, or just didn't see for one reason or another.

And as for having been made fully new in Christ? Nope. Not yet.

And I know that my recognition of this is just the most recent rendition of this variation on a theme.

My grandmother was biased against people of color. She didn't trust 'them' and was shocked when 'one of them' did anything that she agreed with.

Then in her concluding years, she was able to be cared for by people of all colors and started to realize that maybe she wasn't as correct as she thought she was.

See, I am making all things new.

Where I grew up, good protestant Christians were taught (even if it was 'just' by example) that we should be wary of the Catholics.

I am now so thankful to be able to study God's Word with a 'good' Catholic and am so thankful for the ways that we have and are still able to worship with our brothers and sisters in Christ over at St. Elizabeth Anne Seton.

See, I am making all things new.

Then we wondered if this praise and worship music was actually appropriate to be offered up in our worship services.

While all of us still have pieces that we like more than others, we are able to view all that is offered up through the lens of, 'is it a joyful offering to God?' If it is, then it is absolutely appropriate!

See I am making all things new!

There was a period in time when the idea of a woman on consistory let alone in the pulpit was decried as going against the tenets of scripture.

There are places where this is still up for debate...even though we have come to a place in this congregation where, if we are able to see the gifts of the Spirit at work in someone, then we will celebrate that and ask them to put them to use, and that absolutely includes serving on consistory and leading worship.

See, I am making all things new.

And now we're talking about it again in regard to members of the LGBTQ+ community (at least at the denominational level – the Reformed Church in America and even the United Methodist Church are just two examples). And we all know how divisive that conversation can become depending on where the conversation is held. I sat in the denominational meetings last year out in Michigan: I've got a pretty good feel for the level of angst that results in vitriol that is being lobbed from certain edges of the conversation; which, as I have viewed it, is done way more often by the traditionalist perspective (as it has been labeled).

Question: 'If then God gave 'them' the same gift that he gave 'us' when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who [am] I that I could hinder God?'

Peter and the early church leadership had a mirror put up in front of them that caused them discomfort. But even in that discomfort, they were willing to remain around the table, with one another and these new folks whom they didn't know and couldn't completely vouch for, prayerfully asking for God's truth to be more fully revealed (for now we are looking through a glass dimly). We are heirs of that, 'God, how would you have us follow You?' reality, and there are times when by hook and by crook we have brought glory to God's name.

And there have also been those other times as well.

What we do, whatever we do, and while this needs to relate to the denomination of which we are a member, I mean it specifically for Three Bridges as a community of faith, what we do and whatever we do needs to bring glory to God. Love God. Love yourself as God loved you first. Love neighbor.

Remember what God said, 'See, I am making all things new.'

I do not stand up here claiming to know all the truths that are of God.

What I am stating very clearly however, is that these scriptures that we have been given provide us windows into just how radical and transformative our journey of faith with the Son of Man will be. And sometimes those steps may leave us feeling uncomfortable because they take us in directions that we haven't gone before.

If our steps share God's love and shine His light, then God's name is being praised and if I'm wrong then I will fall at the feet of a God who has shown that His son died and was raised even for me and beg for forgiveness.

See, I am making all things new.

To God be the glory...especially when I feel unsure.

### **After Sermon Prayer**

Holy God, we enter into Your Word and are reminded of truths that can cause us to feel...uncomfortable. The disciples were too. And yet, even through those steps of uncertainty, and maybe it's especially through those steps of uncertainty, Your name can be praised in remarkable ways. Lord, help each of us to bring glory to You at all times, in all places, and with all people. Lord, work through even us to help make all things new. It is in Jesus' name that we do pray. Amen.

