

Sunday, August 18, 2013
Rev. Diane Monti-Catania

Sermon – “About to Create a New Thing”

Today we come to the end of our study of Isaiah.

We delve into Book Three, the book of the Anointed Conqueror.

This section is attributed to the same author, or a close disciple, of Second Isaiah.

The Israelites have returned from the exodus, living in the land of Judah, but life remains very harsh.

In the second to last chapter we hear again God’s promise of reward for his dutiful servants.

As Isaiah winds down his long prophecy, we are reminded

“God is about to create new heavens and a new earth. The former things shall not be remembered or come to mind.”

God’s bountiful mercy will be available to all who believe in him.

This message of newness and the promise of transformation are particularly evocative for us at this time of the year.

For many, the new school year is a demarcation of new beginnings.

Each time we start a new season we have the potential to be transformed.

Today, we send our Silver Lake friends out into the world and all over the country students prepare to start new schools, or at least new school years.

Teachers and administrators are gearing up to provide an environment of enrichment and transformation.

We too, can embrace the ‘school calendar’ and decide that this is a turning point – a new beginning for us.

For many, September is a time to return to church-after a summer hiatus.

We prepare an extravagant welcome!

We re-gather as the renewed body of Christ.

We have finished our building project and now we must embark on the important work of defining who we are and what we stand for as a church.

All of these new beginnings take courage.

Last week I participated in a 5-day intensive class on Emotional Intelligence and Group Dynamics at the Claggett Center in Buckeystown, Maryland.

Ten students, mostly clergy, spent 11 hours a day working in groups, processing relationships and analyzing how we were doing!

A discussion on different theories of Group Development included a review of Bill Treasure's work outlined in a book called "Courage Goes to Work."

While Treasurer's work is mainly focused on corporate settings, I thought one particular piece on trust was relevant for us as we move toward our new beginnings.

Courage Goes to Work emphasizes that transformation can only happen with trust. The author categorizes courageous acts into three types:

TRY Courage: TRY Courage is the courage of initiative and action.

It's what you're talking about when you say you want people to try something new or "step up to the plate".

TRY Courage can be seen in "first attempts"—for example, whenever you attempt a new, skill-stretching, or pioneering tasks.

Volunteering to lead a tough or risky project is a demonstration of TRY Courage.

TELL Courage: TELL Courage is the courage of "voice," and involves speaking with candor and conviction, especially when the opinions expressed run counter to the group.

When your TELL Courage is activated, you assert yourself more willingly and confidently.

Your TELL Courage is at work when you tactfully but truthfully provide tough feedback to others, or when you raise your hand and ask for help, or when you acknowledge mistakes you've made before others find out.

TRUST Courage: TRUST Courage is the courage that it takes to relinquish control and rely on others.

Treasure talks of situation where a manager wants employees to embrace company changes more enthusiastically. He says it is TRUST Courage that you want people to have.

When you have TRUST Courage, you give people the benefit of the doubt, instead of questioning the motives and intentions of those around you.

I would expand this particular category to include Trust in God.

When you are able to surrender control of your life to God, Isaiah promises that you will be rewarded.

The newness of life will be provided in a world of peace and joy, safety and abundance.

Long life and fertile land, healthy children; weeping will end.

This is the promise that we heard back in chapter 11.

Isaiah reiterates it here at the end of his book reminding us that God is waiting for us to turn away from sin and toward God.

We have seen in our study of Isaiah, TRY, TELL AND TRUST courage.

It takes all three types of courage to live a life of faith.

We must draw on “Tell Courage” to bear witness to the good news of Jesus Christ, just as Isaiah had the courage to speak the truth to his people.

We must be willing to share our stories of God’s presence in our lives with others.

We must be bold in inviting people to church, in explaining what benefit we derive from being part of a community of faith.

“Trying Courage” is required to develop our spiritual lives.

As we gear up for the coming church year think of what you might try. Maybe you will decide to participate in the Men’s Bible Study on Friday mornings.

Or perhaps you will decide that this is the year that you will help out in the Sunday school – sharing your faith with our young people. You could adopt a prayer practice this year, trying to set aside a designated time each day to be in conversation with God.

Maybe this is the year that you will be brave enough to meet three new people at church – to learn about their lives and to understand what is important to them.

Perhaps the largest challenge for each of us is the one that requires Trust Courage.

I already mentioned surrendering control to God, but I want to add the idea that we work on developing a deeper trust in one another.

I would like to see us, in the year ahead, putting Isaiah’s teachings into practice in our church and our community.

I want us to build the holy mountain that Isaiah described.

I think that we can work together, using all of our energy and all of our resources, trusting in our ability to transform the world – with God’s help.

One of the things I love about the Book of Isaiah is the expansiveness of his poetry.

Isaiah speaks in terms of mountains and valleys; of heaven and angels, of peace and joy that knows no bounds.

This is what our faith is about.

This is what ought to set us apart from the rest of the world.

We have the opportunity to live in God's glorious new creation.

We need only have the courage.

Perhaps this seems daunting to you.

You might be thinking to yourself that our lives are full and we don't need to take on transforming the world.

Back in chapter six we heard of Isaiah's call.

God asked, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?"

And Isaiah said, "Here am I, send me."

My friends, we too have been called.

If we don't have the courage to answer God, who will take our place?

If we are too weary to spread the good news of Jesus Christ, whose message will be heard?

If the Holy Mountain seems to steep for us to climb, who will live there?

The 40th chapter of Isaiah promises that those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

Let's move into the new church year, the new school year with the courage to tell, to try and to trust.

[Let us pray]

or

[Let's spend a few minutes winding up our conversation about Isaiah.]

1. What part of Isaiah's message has stayed with you this summer?
2. Does the idea of a new heaven and a new earth appeal to you?
3. Do you have any personal stories of telling, trying or trusting courage that resulted in transformation?