

**Sermon – Sunday, November 13, 2022**

**Deacon Martha**

I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; Brothers and sisters, do not be weary in doing what is right; By your endurance you will gain your souls.

Do you consider yourself to be creative? Have you a particular gift that you nurture and allow to flourish, to be used to your delight and joy, to share with others, contribute to the common good and to glorify our Creator? I say, yes you do have a gift; God gave it to you. We do, each of us does. And along with that, I believe is the talent that helps us bring it to light.

A mandatory segment of education when I was in eighth grade was Home-Ec. (Gasp!. Heaven forbid that any female would be allowed into the male dominated ‘shop class’ instead, or vice versa, a male come into the ladies’ domain!). The particular nightmare here was the unit involving sewing. My maternal grandma was an expert seamstress who created beautiful fashions for me and my three sisters. Gram Stroud had to move from her home in Kenmore and into an apartment closer to us. Still, she trudged a narrow staircase to the cupola where her old treadle sewing machine was set up. She created contemporary fashions using McCall, Butterick, and free-form patterns. Unfortunately, I did not follow in her footsteps and have more than once, regretted that I didn’t take lessons from her. The Grey Poupon mustard-colored material I chose, Heaven knows why! was part of the assignment; go to the store, find the material and buy the required amount of fabric for the dress. I’m sure I broke at least one of the commandments when agonizing through every single minute of the class as I struggled to untangle the bobbins, pin the crinkled paper of the pattern to the hideous material and cut a straight line with the scissors that weren’t pinking shears but seemed to become the zig-zag blades as I tried to make a uniform cut. And what a treat when each young lady got to “model” her new creation!

A little earlier we heard the reading from Isaiah. He speaks those words at a time when the people of Judah are deeply divided, their lives are difficult and they believe other nations are thriving at their expense. They’ve become cynical about their prospects. Give us something new they say. Sound familiar? God responds through the prophet Isaiah that that is just what he wants to do!

The thing is, just as our ancestors did, you and I must be willing to accept change, a new way of doing things, be willing to adapt to what “good change” means to us. Something I came across in my research for today’s sermon was the term moral capital. It is defined as the set of shared norms, values, and institutions that make common life possible.

For me, it’s important that I stay in relationship with my Creator, with Jesus whose example and lifestyle are a model, and that I remain in constant connection with the Holy Spirit who guides and directs me. But of equal importance, it seems to me, is to have a willingness to invest in the bank of moral capital. I suggest it is something like this that I read in a recent meditation from Richard Rohr focusing on inter-spiritual theologian Raimon Panikkar: “He spent a lot of time thinking about what it might mean for Christians to focus on contributing to the world’s faiths instead of dominating them. Born in Spain to a Catholic mother and Hindu father, he

used the analogy of the world's great rivers. The Jordan, the Tiber, and the Ganges all nourish the lives of those who live along their banks, he said. One flows through Israel, one flows through Rome, and one flows through India. If he were writing today, he might have included the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, which flow through Turkey, Syria, and Iraq. None of these meet on earth, Panikkar said, though they do meet in the heavens, where water from each of them condenses into clouds that rain down on all mortals of the earth. In the same way, he said, the religions of the world remain distinct and unmixed on earth-but "they meet once transformed into vapor, once metamorphosed into Spirit, which then is poured down in innumerable tongues." Eventually all people of faith must decide how they will think about and respond to people of other (or no) faiths. Otherwise, they will be left at the mercy of their worst impulses when push comes to shove and their fear deadens them to the best teachings of their religions.

We're given tools to help fashion new heavens and a new earth. Godly wisdom and words from Jesus, promptings from the Holy Spirit. Imagination, dreams, gifts of the Spirit such as teaching mercy, exhortation/encouragement among others. And nourished by fruits of the spirit, kindness, patience, gentleness, self-control to name a few.

Today's collect gives insight on how one might access and be transformed by scripture. You may want to take a few minutes to ponder this collect, taking to heart the message, and trying it as a guide. Perhaps you'll see with new eyes a way you're called to bring about a much-needed change for the good in your surroundings.

As was I, unable to create a dress without multiple flaws, you and I will very likely be called into situations and experiences and encounters that test our comfort zone. These are opportunities. Just as I struggled with sewing instruction in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, it taught me perseverance, patience, and appreciation for the gifts of others. Exposed to various educational tools and instruction in the years following, I found my gift, embedded from the beginning and with help and support from others and my own quest into various spiritual writings, I began to learn how to call forth and use the gift and talent.

The kingdom of God is very near, doesn't necessarily mean end times. Think about that. Might it mean that by being cocreators with God, with His children and all creation, the Eden where wolf and lamb feed together, lion eats straw like the ox and no destruction in the sacred spaces will happen? Can it be that it is our call to use our gifts to deconstruct the walls of the great institutions and remove the barriers that separate God's family? Gone will be the days of racial division, implicit bias placed upon those who are different, xenophobia, homophobia, misogyny. They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain...

What is it that I have, that you have, to contribute to the new heavens and new earth-an always evolving creation, a return to Eden-like existence...to dismantle stone by stone the temples and institutions that are built on greed, racism, injustice, pride, arrogance at the expense of the marginalized: LGBTQ+, people of color, women, and the poor?

There can be no taking sides; rather there must be a coming together with values that contribute to the common good, an investment in the bank of moral capital. Sharing our gifts and talents-God given-to continue to bring forth new heavens and a new earth-God's kingdom-ever evolving. A righteous rain that waters the parched, burning, earth, that fills the seas and rivers and steam beds, that provides thirst-quenching, life-giving sustenance to humankind and all creatures. As stewards, to make this world better than we found it. I wasn't a very competent seamstress, but I was exposed to elements, things outside of my comfort zone. And as I grew, I was provided with the tools with which to create something new, to experiment, to share the wisdom, to be grateful even for those things that showed me what I wasn't called to be.

I suspect we are becoming weary. That's why it's so important to engage in even small things in our corner of the universe that will have a ripple effect; continue to plant seeds that we know won't produce before our lives on earth are done; to create community and be in relationship; to hold each other up and sustain each other regardless of differences. And in that, endure to gain our souls.