

“Making All Things New”

Matthew 18:15-20

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Designated Minister

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From the Pulpit

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Let us pray: O Holy One, come to us now in this time of reflection and meditation. Touch our hearts and stir our spirits through Your Word for us this day. And may the words of my mouth and the mediations of my heart please You and honor You and glorify Your holy name.

In Jesus’ name, we pray, Amen.

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Making all things new. The title of my sermon this morning is “Making All Things New.” These four words – **since** *this past summer* – have become a theme, so to speak, across our denomination, the United Church of Christ.

As you may know, “Making All Things New” was the theme of our *biennial* UCC assembly this past summer which took place in Indianapolis.

Now, at General Synod, this time, one of the many resolutions that was passed (by one vote!) was to amend our long-standing denominational by-law regarding the frequency of our General Synod assemblies; and so, in the near future, within a couple of years, our meeting schedule will change to every three years rather than every two years.

This is certainly a denominational example of making all things new!

Many of you know that within our denominational structure, we are part of the Heartland Conference of the UCC – which includes all the local Associations throughout Ohio as well as Northern Kentucky.

And our *Conference* annual gathering will take place later this month – on the last weekend of September, nearby, in Canal Winchester – **and** the Conference organizers have decided to stick with this same theme, “Making All Things New.”

And here, at the local level, First Church is part of the Central Southeast Ohio Association of the Heartland Conference – and **our** Fall Association Meeting will take place the last weekend in October – and what do you suppose we selected as the theme?

Making All Things New!

And so, you see, our UCC theme of “Making All Things New” has been significantly shaping our denomination at every level! And therefore, this theme has certainly been on my heart during these past few months.

And, during these last couple of weeks, as I have been engaging this familiar Gospel reading from Matthew about conflict and struggle **and** reconciliation within the earliest church, the theme that has emerged for me for this sermon, this time, is “Making All Things New.”

Now, you might recognize those words, “making all things new,” from Scripture ... they come from **Isaiah 43:18-19**, which, by the way, is NOT our Old Testament reading for this morning!

However, as I was reflecting on our Gospel reading from Matthew recently, **I heard** these very words of **Isaiah** *behind* Jesus’ teaching that day – so to speak – as his disciples gathered around him – to soak up the wisdom and the inspiration of their beloved rabbi and leader.

Now, we know (from the Gospel of Luke) that beginning at a very young age, Jesus became a student *and also* a teacher of the Holy Scriptures. And in all four of the Gospels, Jesus regularly references the Hebrew writings in his teaching – but the prophet who Jesus quoted the most often was **Isaiah!**

And so, here, in our text for today – which is found in the 18th chapter of Matthew – and comes from a section of Matthew that is known as the *Discourse on the Church* – Jesus is advising and instructing his disciples about **church conflict**.

Now, in this particular teaching, **it is significant** that Jesus *doesn't* promise that disagreements and conflict can be – or even should be – avoided; but rather, Jesus gives his followers some clearly-defined steps – of an intentional conflict-resolution process – *that* was appropriate for *that* particular context – in that particular time – within the earliest Christian community.

And so, it is here, in our Gospel reading this morning, where we find Jesus inspiring and empowering his followers to the *higher task* of **reconciliation**. And he even equips them with this very specific approach to use when divisions invariably arise.

And so, in our text today, Jesus offered his disciples hope – and promise – and a way – to **make all things new!**

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I so appreciate the insights of the Rev. Dr. Jin S. Kim, Senior Pastor of the Church of All Nations in Minneapolis, who wrote about this text:

*What makes us Christian is **not** whether or not we fight, disagree, or wound one another but by **how** we go about addressing and resolving those issues. (These are powerful words!)*

I wholeheartedly agree with Rev. Kim!

As a covenantal people – living together within community – Jesus always calls us to the higher task of reconciliation and resolution – *while* we continually imagine – and reimagine – our life together – as the church in the world today!

Our Gospel reading for today is, indeed, about **making all things new!**

As we all look around First Church – today – it is evident that God is making all things new!

On this very day, we will formally welcome seven new members into the life and ministry of First Church – and three others from our New Members Class with be joining at a later time!

God is making all things new!

As you already know, *today* is the first day of Sunday School for all ages – and there is much enthusiasm and support for our new curriculum called **Godly Play** – as well as our new **Sunday Stories** ministry for young children during worship.

God is making all things new!

Our *full* choir is back in the chancel today, singing gloriously, under the direction of our “new-ish” Minister of Music, Josh Stafford, who has also put together a robust calendar of concerts for this coming year!

God is making all things new!

Our new Stephen Ministry training class has been meeting weekly for a few months now, and later this fall, they’ll be commissioned to provide one-to-one care and emotional support for those with such a need within our congregation.

God is making all things new!

Later in October, we will hold our first **Healthy Congregations** workshop for the congregation which will focus on strengthening leadership skills, communication practices, and conflict resolution.

God is making all things new!

And wait 'til you see what our Church Vitality Commission is planning for our Legacy Sunday celebration and picnic in a couple of weeks. It's going to be a whole lot of fun – for all ages!

God is making all things new!

I'd like to close this morning with some words of prayer that were written by the Rev. Ted Loder, a retired Methodist minister and author (He is now 93 years old!)

Let us pray:

O God,
Help us to believe in beginnings,
to make a beginning,
to be a beginning,
so that we may not just grow old,
but grow new,
each day of this wild, amazing life
that You call us to live
with the passion of Jesus Christ.

God is making all things new – Amen!

