

July 4, 2021

Fear Not! God's Doing a New Thing!

FUMC

Isaiah 43:1-3a; 18-19a

43 But now thus says the LORD, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. ²When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; & through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, & the flame shall not consume you. ^{3a}For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. ¹⁸Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. ^{19a}I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?

FEAR NOT! God's doing a new thing!

- Pastor Jess... FEAR NOT! Why? **God's doing a new thing!**
- Choir/KRR Praise Team... FEAR NOT! Why? **God's doing a new thing!**
- All you worshipping virtually & here in-person...
FEAR NOT! Why? **God's doing a new thing!**
- Oh people of God... FEAR NOT! Why? **God's doing a new thing!**

~As we emerge from a world-wide pandemic... FEAR NOT! **God's doing a new thing!**

~As 2 brand new pastors step into servant leadership here at First UMC...FEAR NOT! **God's doing a new thing!**

~As our church embraces new opportunities and new ways of being together...FEAR NOT! **God's doing a new thing!**

My friends, we are told—"Fear not"... "Fear not" over and over again throughout the Hebrew and Christian scriptures because God KNOWS we need assurance and hope and grace amidst the chaos & change & challenges of life together in this world.

"Fear not" are divine words that come from prophets of old, angels sent as messengers and from Jesus himself. "Fear not" are Spirit-infused words that empower and release those who receive them, claim them, and trust in them. "Fear not" empowers and releases us from that which tries to crush our spirits, darken our soul, and tear us apart from God and each other.

These LIFE-GIVING words, or some variation, are mentioned almost 400 times throughout the Bible. Scholars believe this is THE most repeated command from God.

So, if you're like me...needing to hear those words of hope to overcome and release fear: like my fear of failure as I begin a new appointment as Lead Pastor...Or my fear of change as I'm leaving my support system and work as a DS...OR my fears of not living up to your expectations, my own expectations... And God's expectations...And yes the fear of simply not being good enough...ALL worm around my head and heart far too often...

So if you can resonate with any of my fears, then **you** and **I** can journey alongside Centuries of other faithful, imperfect people who need to hear—“FEAR NOT!” from our amazing God. Amen?

My friends, this is so important that Pastor Jess and I decided to create a July preaching series to focus upon God’s call, hope and challenge to “Fear not!” And I’m going to spend a few minutes on what we just heard from the Prophet Isaiah as shared by Tricia/Pastor Jess. The prophet proclaimed fear not people of God—for I have redeemed you, called you by name, you are mine-says the Lord God.

Isaiah then outlines in this one powerful chapter that our God protects us and restores us—using these clarifying words: I am your Savior; you are precious in my sight and honored; I Love you. I am with you; I am God...I work and who can hinder it? (I love that!) I am Creator; I am your Redeemer; Your King; the Holy One...**So**...FEAR NOT...I am about to do a new thing; Now it springs forth, Do you not perceive it? Talk about some powerful words of hope and possibility...Amen? Words we need to hear and claim for our lives, for our church and for our world!

For me Isaiah 43:19 is a core Scripture verse that calls me to be ever ready and ever watchful for new beginnings. There is nothing to fear in the act of beginning...of doing a new thing.

Over these past few months I have been reading, praying over, and journaling in my morning devotions upon the Spirit-breathed book by John O’Donohue, “To Bless the Space Between us.” O’Donohue is a Celtic Spiritualist and poet who has totally rocked by world and impacted my soul deeply during these months of change and transition. He devotes a section on “Beginnings” that I feel speaks to our reality.

O’Donohue writes: There is nothing to fear in the act of beginning. The art of harvesting the secret riches of our lives is best achieved when we place profound trust in the act of beginning. Risk might be our greatest ally. When the heart is ready for a fresh beginning, Unforeseen things can emerge. And in a sense, this is exactly what a beginning does. It is an opening for surprises. Surrounding the intention and the act of beginning, there are always exciting possibilities.

O’Donohue says: This is what inevitably excites artists.

So much can happen between the moment the brush is taken into the hand...
And the moment it touches the canvas.

Such beginnings have their own mind, and they invite and unveil new gifts and arrivals in one’s life. (pp 3-5)

Beginnings are new horizons that WANT to be seen...WANT to be revealed...“I am about to do a new thing” God whispers excitedly...“Now it springs forth! Do you not perceive it?”

Beginnings are not regressions or repetitions; As the prophet said: “Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old, I am about to do a new thing!” Beginnings in and through the power and work of God’s Holy Spirit find clearance and release from regressions or repetitions...And become free from the grip of the past.

My siblings in Christ—What is the new horizon in YOU that wants to be seen?

What new beginning, what new thing is God about to do...Desires to do...hopes to do in your life? Or in your family? Or what new thing is God about to do or hopes to do in this church family here...at First UMC of Moorestown?

For me it was to say “YES” to this appointment—To leave behind my fears, my comfort zone, my unfinished work as a DS—And Risk...TRUSTING God was about to do a new thing in my life, In my call, in my role as pastor and leader in Christ’s church.

And it has been a soul-unleashing, new beginning for me to grow and become Something more, something greater here...Alongside all of you...and with all those whom God will place with us...On this adventure of faith.

Because God is ALWAYS doing a new thing...Whispering into the hearts of people we don’t even know yet—“Hey...I’m about to do a new thing in your life...now it springs forth at First UMC of Moorestown...do you not perceive it?”

Fear Not my friends...God’s doing a new thing!

And we got this, cause God’s got us and is calling us to new beginnings...

Let us get ready for the adventure of a life-time together
as we find our way across new virtual frontiers as the church
as we reach out to the community to the least and lost
as we love the broken, the hurting and wounded
as we welcome and embrace ALL to the church of Jesus Christ

Fear not my friends! WHY? God’s Doing a New Thing!

Amen and amen!

BENEDICTION:

Some have wondered why we offer a final blessing in worship. O'Donohue says it simply and beautifully—A blessing is a circle of light drawn around a person to protect, heal and strengthen. Life is a constant flow of emergence. The beauty of blessing is its belief that it can affect what unfolds, what is emerging.

So receive his Blessing for a New Beginning:

Though your destination is not yet clear
You can trust the promise of this opening;
Unfurl yourself into the grace of beginning
That is at one with your life's desire.

Awaken your spirit to adventure;
Hold nothing back, learn to find ease in risk;
Soon you will be home in a new rhythm,
For your soul senses the world that awaits you.

Amen and amen.