

Do a New Thing

God is always doing a new thing.

At the beginning of June, I attended the ordination of the Diocese's newest deacon and the three transitional deacons who will in a few months be ordained priests. Through these newly ordained, God is doing a new thing.

At every ordination, be it for deacon, priest, or bishop, there is an examination, a series of questions that begins with a description of what the deacon, priest, or bishop is called to be and do in the church and in their life. Once again I heard the bishop speak to the deacon's call to serve all people, particularly the poor, the weak, the sick and the lonely and to interpret to the Church the needs, concerns, and hopes of the world.

When I hear the examination and listen to the questions, I answer them again in my own heart. Every time different words stand out. Every time I hear them as if it still is 2006 and it's me there standing before the Bishop, stole-less, in breathless anticipation. This

June the words “you are to make Christ and his redemptive love known, by your word and example, to those among whom you live and work and worship” stood out. Like the new deacon, like all deacons, I am called to do new things in new places – new to me and sometimes new to those among whom I serve. I thought to myself, “Is this my new thing?” The words I usually hear, the interpreting the needs, hopes and concerns of the world to the Church” are words I have heard for years. But am I living a life that makes Christ’s redemptive love known to you, to everyone I meet? This is my “new” hearing and it is also the “new thing” I am called to live into at this time, in this place.

Today we hear Jesus' final instructions to his disciples before he sends them out to carry his message of the new thing God is doing – the new thing God is doing in the ministry of Jesus, the ministry to the poor, the weak, the sick, the lonely, the ministry of proclamation, the ministry of the Good News of God’s love for the world. Jesus gives the disciples the power to heal and the authority to proclaim the Good News that the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. He tells them to proclaim what he has taught them not fearfully in whispers but boldly from the rooftops. He reminds them that they are in God's care, that God, who knows the very number of hairs on their heads will be with

them. And he ends with the words we hear today – that wherever they are welcomed, he and God are welcomed also. He calls them prophets and righteous, and with a phrase that speaks to people living in a dry and dusty place, concludes that those who hear the disciples' message and act upon it, giving even a cup of cold water to "one of these little ones" will be rewarded. Then off they go – and off he goes – to preach and teach and spread the good news that God is doing a new thing in the world he loves.

I bet they were scared. I bet they didn't want to go. Not so much because they worried about personal safety, but because this new thing - proclaiming the Kingdom and healing the sick - was not in their job descriptions or self descriptions. They were, after all, fishermen and a tax collector and a zealot, not healers or prophets. It isn't what they were expecting, these disciples, these students of Jesus. They thought the new thing to be the task of the teacher, the rabbi, not the student, the disciple. They probably thought they weren't ready, that they hadn't spent enough time as disciples. After all it's one thing to be a disciple – and listen to Jesus speak of the Kingdom. It's one thing to be a disciple and watch Jesus touch the leper and cure the paralytic. It's one thing to be a disciple and let Jesus draw the criticism as he sits at the table with tax collectors and

sinners. It's one thing to be a disciple and hear Jesus teach about loving enemies and praying for those who persecute you. It's one thing to be a disciple and sit at the feet of the teacher and learn about God's new thing. It's one thing to be a disciple and quite another to be an apostle. It's quite another thing to be an apostle and be sent out and step out. It's quite another thing to be an apostle and leave the comfortable classroom of discipleship to be with people you don't know and who don't know you. It's quite another thing to be an apostle and participate in God's new thing directly. But that is exactly what Jesus expects them to do.

And that's exactly what Jesus expects us to do. He sends us out, out of our red doors, to make God's love known to the world. He expects us collectively and individually to leave the pew, roll up our sleeves and go to work. He says, like he said to his students in Galilee, it's time to graduate from our discipleship classroom and become apostles. It's time to be sent out and to step out, step out of our comfort zones, and carry the message, to tell and live the Good News. He expects us to touch and be touched. He expects us to love our neighbors and our enemies. He expects us to recognize when we resist God coming into our lives and to stop resisting and let God into our lives, let God shake us up and change our job descriptions, let God

show us God's new thing so we can share God's new thing with the world.

The disciples had to leave their old ways and be with people in a new way doing a new thing. We too have to leave our old ways and our old job and self descriptions and be with people in a new way doing a new thing.

Leave the old ways and learn a new way. How do we do that? You know I'm going to have some suggestions. It may be attending the adult forum in the fall, or joining EfM, BibLit or Bible study, or teaching Sunday school or working with the young people or volunteering at the Stanton Center or in your local school – because teaching and learning always take us to newness. It may be becoming a lay Eucharistic minister and taking the sacrament to the housebound. The new thing may be learning to knit and making baptism blankets, prayer shawls, or scarves for the homeless here in Annapolis, hats for the seafarers, or socks for the children in Afghanistan. Perhaps you'll be cooking supper for the Lighthouse Shelter or making lunches for hungry children. You might find yourself supporting the people here at St. Anne's as they prepare to go to Guatemala or sponsoring a child in an impoverished county or

becoming a banker-to-the-poor through Kiva. The new thing may be joining Bread for the World and writing letters to Congress or it may be writing letters for Ford Rowan to carry into Maryland's penitentiaries. The new thing may be giving money to bring water to someone who has none –through Episcopal Relief and Development - to the child in Africa who walks miles every day for water or, doing the hardest thing of all, as a preacher once said, opening our wallet to the person on the street who asks for a dollar and giving without judging, giving in love and as a reminder that God's love is there for all.

I don't know what you will do but you will do something new. And so will I. Because we are those whom Jesus sends and to be sent by Jesus is to get up, leave the old ways and, in love and for love, with God and for God, do a new thing.

Amen.

Check it out and do a new thing!

Outreach ministries at St. Anne's <http://www.stannes-annapolis.org/main.asp?page=2157>

Episcopal Relief and Development <http://www.er-d.org/>

Seafarers <http://www.baltseafarers.ang-md.org/>

Afghans for Afghans <http://www.afghansforafghans.org/>

Kiva <http://www.kiva.org/>

Bread for the World <http://www.bread.org/>