

Stepping into the New: Trusting God in Uncertainty

A Sermon by Ericca Cavender-Caldwell

Good morning, my friends. Here we are, in the middle of Lent—a season of penitence and sacrifice. I'd like to start by reflecting on what this season often looks like for many of us. Traditionally, Lent is a time to give something up—maybe it's meat, sweets, or another comfort we cherish. This year, for me, it's my pink and purple hair. If you've seen me before, you know it's part of who I am, so letting it go has been a real sacrifice.

But today, I want to invite us to think about Lent a little differently. Instead of just giving something up, what if we also considered adding something back in? Some people choose to take on a new spiritual practice rather than give something up. What if, this Lent, we added back in something foundational: Hope? Hope is powerful, especially in uncertain times, and right now, as we face this transition at St. Andrew's, hope is exactly what we need. As we prepare to sell our building, there are many unknowns, and that can feel unsettling. But Lent reminds us that God is always at work, even when we can't see it clearly. And God promises that something new is on the horizon—something beyond what we can imagine.

In our reading from Isaiah, we hear God speaking to a people in exile, a people who are feeling lost, uncertain, and overwhelmed. The Israelites have faced hardship and loss, and they have no idea what the future holds. But God comes to them with a powerful word:

"See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?" (Isaiah 43:19)

God tells them to stop looking back at what they've lost and instead look ahead at what God is doing right now. God is making a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. The people of

Israel have been through so much, but God is promising something new. They don't need to dwell on the past; they need to focus on what God is bringing about.

And here's the question for us: Can we perceive it? In the midst of our own wilderness—this time of transition, uncertainty, and change—can we perceive the new thing God is doing? Can you feel it in your bones? I believe God is already stirring something new among us, even if we can't fully see it yet. The way forward may not be entirely clear, but God is with us, making a way.

We might not know where we'll worship come May 4th, and we might grieve the loss of our beloved building, but God is still at work, creating something new. Just as God made a way in the wilderness for the Israelites, so God is leading us into something new. We long for certainty. We want to know every detail. We want to feel secure and less anxious. But what do we truly need? What we need is faith—the faith to trust that God's promise is real. The God who has led us this far is the same God who will lead us forward.

And as we step into this new chapter, let's not forget something important: each of us was once new here. Think back to the first time you walked through the doors of St. Andrew's. Maybe it was exciting, but for many, it was also nerve-racking. Meeting new people, finding your place in a community, stepping into the unknown—it wasn't always easy. But we stayed because we found something beautiful here. We found a place where we could be loved and where we could love others. And just as we once felt uncertain, we now have the opportunity to open our hearts to whatever comes next, welcoming the newness with the same grace and love that was once extended to us.

In our reading from Philippians, Paul shares his own experience of letting go of the past in order to step into something new. Paul had everything—status, privilege, security—but when he encountered Christ, he was willing to give it all up for the sake of something greater. Paul writes:

"But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord."
(Philippians 3:7-8)

Paul was willing to give up what he thought was important because he understood that knowing Christ, following Christ, and living in faith were worth so much more. Paul stepped into the unknown because he knew that Christ was leading him toward something greater than anything he had left behind.

We, too, are called to step into the unknown. We might not know exactly where we're going, but we do know that God is calling us forward. We might need to let go of some things—the comforts, the familiarity, the sense of security we once had—but when we do, we make room for God to do a new thing in our lives. And just like Paul, we are invited to focus on the “surpassing worth” of knowing Christ, trusting that God’s way is better than our own.

Richard Rohr writes, "Unfortunately, our natural instinct is to try to fix pain, to control it, or even, foolishly, to try to understand it. The ego insists on understanding. That's why Jesus praises a certain quality even more than love, and he calls it faith. It is the ability to stand in liminal space, to stand on the threshold, to hold the contraries until we are moved by grace to a much deeper level and a much larger frame, where our private pain is not center stage but a

mystery shared with every act of bloodshed and every tear wept since the beginning of time.

Our pain is not just our own" (Rohr, "Transforming Pain," *Meditation*, October 17, 2018).

This is a time of grief and uncertainty, but it is also a time of profound opportunity. If we cling too tightly to what we are losing, we risk missing the blessing that is unfolding before us. But if we allow this transition to be a space of transformation, if we trust that God is indeed doing something new, then this time of change will not be about loss—it will be about renewal. We can choose to be people who transform pain into hope, who step forward in faith rather than be held back by fear.

This moment is not the end of St. Andrew's. It's the beginning of a new chapter. God is doing a new thing, and we are called to step into that new thing with faith and hope. We may not have all the answers, and it's okay to feel uncertain, but we know that God is leading us into something good. So let's walk forward in faith, not looking back, but trusting that the new thing God is doing will be worth the journey. Amen.

Bibliography

Rohr, Richard. "Transforming Pain." *Meditation*, Center for Action and Contemplation, October 17, 2018.