

A Sermon by the Rev. Jeffrey A. Packard	Prepared for the congregation of Christ Episcopal Church, Spotsylvania
To be delivered on April 19, 2014 Creation, Flood, Red Sea, Dry Bones	On the occasion of the Great Vigil of Easter

God's New Thing

The story of God from the beginning has been the story of making something new, bringing something out of nothing, bringing God's people to a new place to start a new life, and breathing God's own spirit into the dry, dead bones of those who have fallen away from following him. And from the beginning, it has surprised us. Every time God does a new thing, we have trouble keeping up. After Adam and Eve were placed in God's new creation, they couldn't manage to keep the one commandment he gave them. After preserving for himself a remnant of people and creatures through the destruction of the flood, Noah and his descendents fell into the same old sinful ways that were abhorred before the flood. After being liberated by God's strong right arm from slavery in Egypt, in the wilderness the people longed to go back to their life of servitude where they at least had food and water. And when God led them back to the promised land after the Babylonian exile, God's people found that life was no easier, nor was it any easier to follow the commandments of the God of new life.

We still read these remarkable stories because they continue to speak to us with the truth that they had for their original hearers. The story of God's people is a long epic of commandments broken and faithfulness lost, of broken vows and broken relationships, of people being motivated more by fear than by love. This story is our story, and we continue to live it out. Most of all this story is about how, time after time, God's love brought mercy to God's people, how God continually gives us new life. Even after Jesus' resurrection from the dead, his followers struggled to figure out what it meant to live this new life they had by their connection

to Christ through baptism. God had once again done a new thing, and we continue to struggle to keep up.

What does it mean, this new life we have in Christ? St. Paul writes, “We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin... So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.” We are dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Does that mean that we never sin? Of course not. Does that mean that once we are connected to Christ through our baptism, once our old self is crucified with him, then we are made perfect? Of course not. It just means that sin no longer has the final say in our lives. It means we have nothing to fear. It means we have been set free from sin's tyranny, not that it is not still active in our lives, but that the wages of sin, that is death, is not the end for us by virtue of Christ's resurrection. “For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.” God's mercy has once again been poured out on us. God has once again done a new thing. This time what God did was definitive. Christ died once for all. This new life is offered to anyone and everyone.

Living out this new life doesn't mean we won't make mistakes. We are still human, after all. It means that we have been released from fear, which is the opposite of love. “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love.” (1 John 4:18) We do not need to fear punishment. We do not need to fear death. Our new life in Christ has opened a new world to us, a world ruled by God's perfect love.

So let us try together to live in this new world. Let us strive each day of this new life we have to live without fear, to live according to the ways of love demonstrated to us by centuries of

God's involvement with his people, and definitively showed to us by God's Son Jesus. Let us work together to be the people God has been calling us to be from the beginning. Most of all, let us try to keep up whenever God does a new thing.