

**Pastor Jonna Bohigian**

**St. Timothy's Lutheran Church**

**Something New**

Isaiah 43:16 – 21

It's the start of a new year. Can you believe it? Well, the reality is that whether you can or you can't believe it, it's started. We are already 5 days in. Pretty soon, we will get used to writing "2020" on our checks, calendars, and agendas, and it will seem normal to be in a new year, a new *decade*, even.

For most of us, we are more than happy to say, "Sayonara 2019" and "Hello 2020!" As we can say at the end of most years, 2019 was not what we expected, and for many of us, it was not an easy year. For some of us, 2019 was the *most* difficult year we've lived. Grieving losses, doing the difficult but necessary work, adjusting to change, living with and fighting illness, and doing *all* that we can to live another day. And for some of us, 2019 was one of the most joyous years we've lived. Rejoicing over new life, entering new and meaningful work and schools, getting promotions, restoring relationships, and experiencing growth.

It's amazing all that can happen in a year, and that was just considering the personal level. We will be seeing timelines of the good and ill of 2019 nationally and globally. And then of course, what has happened over the course of the year in our places of employment, our schools, recreational groups, and organizations. It's enough to make us feel tiny in this vast and intricate world we live.

And then, there's St. Timothy's. In 2019, we welcomed new leaders. We said "goodbye" to one of our pastors. We gained new members and lost beloved saints. We said "goodbye" to our elementary school and celebrated God's work over those 40 years. We formed a Call Team and prepared for Pastor Dan's unknown departure.

We saw Pastor Dan's election and saw him become our denomination's bishop. We celebrated his 25 years of ministry with St. Tim's. We said "goodbye" and commissioned him for his new calling. We initiated Alpha and saw a new ministry birthed at City Team. We continued with our established ministries and saw ministries like our FISH Food Pantry blossom. We started new Grow Groups and formed new relationships. We saw the re-launch of our preschool. We saw our staff shift to different roles to cover the needs of the church. We welcomed Pastor Jim and Pastor Judy back on board during this interim season. We saw ourselves volunteering for things we never thought we'd do, to serve the church.

A lot happened at St. Timothy's in 2019, and those were just the broad strokes! Lives have been touched by the ministry of St. Timothy's and by the expression of your lives to your families, friends, neighbors, coworkers, and colleagues. I am truly impressed by the generosity, the commitment, the flexibility, and the prayers – the faithfulness of this church.

When Pastor Dan was elected Bishop, I prepared myself for a seismic shift at St. Timothy's. It is not uncommon for members to leave, to be uncooperative, and to discontinue giving of their time and resources, when a lead pastor leaves.

That first Sunday after Dan left, my greatest fear was that the Sanctuary would be empty. I didn't sleep well that night and was exhausted the next day. I prayed for God to increase my faith and to provide, especially *if* everyone left. I looked out at the Sanctuary at the beginning of the service, and lo and behold, (pause) my fears seemed to be realized. The attendance was sparse. It seemed that maybe 75 people were here. The next time I looked up, the Sanctuary was full.

I think you all had a flair for the dramatic that day. Waiting until we got nervous, and then coming in 10 minutes late – or what my dad likes to call “Lutheran Standard Time.”

Jokes aside, I want to thank you. You have committed to Christ’s Church, and not simply to a pastor. Your faithfulness, cooperation, patience, kindness, prayers, helpfulness, and generosity have been gifts to our pastoral and lay staff and to the leadership of St. Timothy’s.

I say this, recognizing that change, no matter how anticipated or good, is not easy. We are creatures of habit, we humans, and change is difficult for us. Lutherans are no exception. I don’t know if you’ve heard the joke about Lutherans changing light bulbs? “How many Lutherans does it take to change a light bulb?” “Change?!”

As much as we may resist change, change is inevitable. And with change, we grieve what used to be, and we experience what now is. And even if we experience something again, as we once did, time has changed, *we* have changed, and it is different.

There is also something to be said about the liminal spaces, those times of waiting. What once was has already left us, but what we are waiting for is not yet here. This is often the hardest place, because we are more aware than ever, that we are not settled. When *will* we be settled, we wonder? When *will* what we are waiting for, come to fruition?

As a military spouse, my mom would *not infrequently* complain about needing to pack up and go, to move somewhere new, and, especially if it was to a cold location, to live in her worst nightmare. But, then my mom would sigh and say,

“I guess I will never be satisfied. I will never feel at home anywhere, because my home is in heaven.” Or, as a friend once said, *all* of life is the “interim.” Life is always changing. There is something both sad and beautiful about that.

In the midst of all of the changes around us, *we* are changed. We grow and hopefully mature, and become different people than what we once were. We are not static; we are *dynamic*.

And our dynamism reflects the One in whose image we were created. God is not static or stagnant; He is *dynamic*. He does not sit idly by and watch us from a distance; He is actively engaged in this world and is always doing something new.

In Isaiah 43, God’s people had been exiled to Babylon. They lived under the foreign rule of those who did not know God, and were unable to return home. They turned away from God. Yet, because of God’s faithfulness and love for them, He gave them a promise. “Behold, I am doing a new thing...I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. The wild beasts will honor me, the jackals and ostriches, for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people, the people whom I formed for myself” (Isa 43:19 – 21). God promised them that He was doing a *new* thing. He would make a way back home so that they would praise Him.

Before the *promise* of returning home, God did something interesting. He reminded them that He was the One who brought them out of slavery in Egypt. He was the One who parted the waters of the Red Sea and brought them safely through. He was the One who destroyed their enemies. Yet, He told them to forget that

Exodus and all that happened before. Forget those things, because God was doing something *new*.

This is *fascinating*. But you get it, right? If our vision is on the past, we will not be able to see what is happening right in front of us. The analogy of driving in the car may be helpful here. We have a windshield to see what is in front of us, side windows to see what is beside us, and rearview mirrors to see what is behind us. We need all of these windows and mirrors to drive safely, but if our attention is primarily on what is beside or behind us, we will crash. Our vision *needs* to be on what is in front of us, because we are driving *forward*.

And so, God says in dramatic fashion, *forget* what is behind, because God is doing something *new*. If their eyes are properly focused, God's people will see what He is doing. He is making a way back home.

This theme of God doing something new is not relegated to the book of Isaiah. We find it frequently in the New Testament. Jesus says to his disciples that he is creating a new covenant in his blood. Paul writes that anyone who is in Christ is a new creation. "The old has passed away: behold, the *new* has come" (2 Cor 5:17b). And, in the final reference to "new" in Scripture, Jesus says, "Behold, I am making *all things new!*" (Rev 21:5).

God is alive and active, present in this world, and constantly bringing about newness. He has created us new and is making *all things new!*

Do we have eyes to see it? Have we shifted our view from the rearview mirror to the windshield? Are our eyes attentive to the hidden work of the Holy

Spirit? Have we shifted our attention from *our* expectations and desires to what the Spirit is doing?

What is the Spirit doing here and at this time? Asking these questions, discerning with the church, and responding in faithfulness, is the task of the church in every age and in every place. What is the Spirit doing here and at this time?

Let's start with our place, the Silicon Valley. The Silicon Valley is "one of the most beautiful and influential metropolitan areas in the world." As one pastor said, "What happens in Vegas might stay in Vegas, but what happens in the Silicon Valley affects the *world*." It is the home of high tech titans, and it is "an economic powerhouse. If it were a country, it would have the 19<sup>th</sup>-largest economy in the world." The Valley is "one of the best-educated populations in the country,"<sup>1</sup> and is home to half of the world's tech billionaires.<sup>2</sup>

As an economic powerhouse, the cost of living is higher than anywhere else in the nation. And with that, comes a level of homelessness higher than any in the nation. Side by side are the richest and the poorest. The poverty of homelessness is a serious concern, as is the poverty of relationships. Overstressed, overworked, isolated from family, and disconnected to faith, Silicon Valley residents are *desperate* for relationship, *desperate* for meaning.

The Silicon Valley is a complicated place, and it's a place *ripe* for God to do something new. Because of needs beyond what the government can provide, the church is perfectly poised to seek to address issues of homelessness. Because of

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/enduring-faithfulness-in-the-san-francisco-bay-area/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2019/apr/30/silicon-valley-wealth-second-richest-country-world-earth>

social needs, the church is the perfect place to offer hospitality and a family. Because of detachment from a faith, the church is the place to share what has been missing.

Because of the needs of our community, this is some of the *new* that God will be doing through us. We will continue to provide support for those in economic and housing poverty through our FISH Food Pantry, Village House, and other means to care for our neighbor. We are directing new energy and staffing to extend hospitality to newcomers, to enhance our worship experience, and to help us connect meaningfully with one another. We will be re-launching greater discipleship efforts to equip you in your lives of ministry. We will be opening positions for new staffing to extend our reach from children through adults. We are placing greater energy into efforts like Alpha, to encourage our neighbors and friends in their exploration of faith and life. We will continue the ministry of our preschool, to reach families through the care and education of children. We will continue to seek out the next pastor for St. Timothy's and continue together in faithfulness. And this is just what we can see *now*.

God is doing something *new* at St. Timothy's and He is doing something new in you. Keep your eyes open and look ahead!

May we have eyes to see what God's Spirit is doing in this time and in this place, with the faithfulness to respond according to His glorious will. Amen.