

"NOTHING NEW?"

"There is nothing new under the sun" (Eccles. 1:9). These are the words taken from the Book of Ecclesiastes which we heard from a moment ago. Based on his experience in his lifetime, based on what he has seen happening around him, there is not much to get excited about. "Vanities of vanities. All life is vanity," or to put by way of another translation of the Hebrew word, life is empty.

In the opening verses the writer says, "A generation goes, and a generation comes....the sun rises and the sun goes down and then hurries to the place it rises...What has been is what will be. All things are wearisome, more than one can express...there is nothing new under the sun." (Eccles 1:4,5,8) Those are despairing words. In fact, we may wonder why they are in the Bible.

Now we hear this sentiment and say, "What do you mean, nothing new?" Look at what we humans have accomplished in the generations which have come and gone since the three thousand years Ecclesiastes wrote these words. Today I think we can say, "There is *everything* new under the sun." "Listen Mister Ecclesiastes, just because you lived in a drab ancient world with no central heating, no air conditioning, or electricity, or online capability, don't go throwing rocks at life until you see just how far we have come." We want to say to him to

I think of the violence and corruption which have become common place occurrences. How far have we come in that regard? When we are told of two people found in the back seat of a car on a Cleveland street, shot to death, in a drug related crime, we tend to think, well not much has changed in Cleveland. Or, when we read of an indictment of another government official, we are no longer shocked. Instead, we say, "Who is it this time?" Or, when a celebrity is brought to trial for drug possession, or a celebrated athlete is arrested for beating his girlfriend, or a little girl is molested, we chime right in with the words of the old cynic, "What has been is what will be, and what has been done, is what will be done. There is nothing new under the sun."

Sometimes it is hard not to be cynical. Sometimes we are in the same frame of mind as Charlie Brown who said in one of the Peanuts cartoons, "I have a new philosophy on life; I'm only going to dread one day at a time." Or, sometimes our life's predicament is such that we feel like the patient who just received the news from his physician who after running a series of tests on him said, "There's no reason you can't live a completely normal life; as long as you don't try to enjoy it."

This is why we need to hear the words of Jesus who stands before a battered creation with arms outstretched saying, Behold, I am make all things new (Revelation 21:5). To the ones who insist there is nothing new under the sun, Christ says, "I make all things new." This is why we gather in worship on

way, while the Book of Ecclesiastes may seem cynical and despairing, at first glance, it is in fact pointing us to the one who is our hope. Apart from Jesus Christ, I don't believe it's an exaggeration to say, "all is vanity and a striving after wind." There is, "Nothing new under the sun." Ecclesiastes is a book full of questions, asking why is it that no matter how faithful or unfaithful a person is they meet with the same fate? Why is it that for all the toil and pain people go through, there seems to be no reward for that? Why does random suffering happen regardless of how holy or unholy they are? Why doesn't God do something about it?

And the answer is God has done something about it with Jesus. Not by way of explanation, but by giving us the means of confronting those questions. When the newness of Christ is at work in our lives, when the power of God's spirit is there, it changes the way we see things. Nothing looks the same. The world we live in is not some meaningless mass of rocks and water and nitrates, out of which we have evolved into the human beings we know ourselves to be, it is the stage on which God works his drama of redemption. Because it is here, that the person of Christ, hope wrapped in human flesh, walked among us, and poured out his life for us. We who were created in God's image, and turned away from God's purpose, are given another chance.

Just after a storm, a man was walking on the beach. Maybe you've noticed after a storm when you walk that wet strip between the ocean the dry land, there is all manner of sea life strewn before you; seaweed, hermit crabs, jelly fish, driftwood, all thrown up onto shore by the force of the storm. With some of these creatures it's a life and death struggle. If the hermit crabs don't make it back to the water, the gulls will snatch them up. Starfish can suffocate in the sand. It just so happened that what caught this man's eye were some these tiny starfish which were still alive. You can tell if a starfish is alive on a beach, because it keeps its arms very stiff, to lift its weight from the sand to keep it from suffocating. And when he went up and down along the beach finding living starfish, and he would take them and gently throw them out to sea, watching them fall into the water.

Another man came as he was doing this and said, "Why are you doing that?" And he said, "I'm doing it because they're still alive and if the offshore pull is strong enough, then they might be taken out again." And the man said, "The offshore pull isn't strong enough." "Well, it might be strong enough." He kept throwing the fish. The man said, "Do you collect starfish?" "No, I'm throwing them out there so that no one can collect them." And the man said, "That's foolish," and walked on.*

Foolish? I don't think so. I think there's something very noble about being a star thrower, especially when it's done in the spirit of Christ. The apostle Paul said