

Something Old; Something New

Revelation 21:1-7 (NIV84)

¹ Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ² I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴ He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." ⁵ He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." ⁶ He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. ⁷ He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son.

There is the Old English rhyme that nearly every bride knows, "Something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue." These are the four things that the bride is supposed to have with them or on them for their wedding day. The phrase "something old, something new" encapsulates my time serving Frances as her pastor.

It was something new for me when I arrived in Layton in August of 2014 and began serving as the pastor at Light of the Valley Lutheran Church. I was new to the area, new to the congregation, but at the same time it was all a little old. I'm not talking about the age of the members of my church, but this was something old to me because I had already been a pastor serving a church in Michigan for five years. I knew what I was doing. I was new, but the situation was old, familiar.

In my first month here, a number of new things came up. One was as a phone call while I was out grocery shopping. June Hamblin, one of Frances' and Max's good friends, one of their bowling buddies, and really a big reason why Frances and Max came to Light of the Valley, called because she had just found out that Frances was now at the memory ward of Chancellor Gardens. June was looking out for her friend and fellow believer. She asked me to go over there as soon as I could to pray with her. I arrived at Chancellor Gardens as something new. But I knew that this would be something that would also be old, something familiar. I could do what I've done before in visiting other people in other memory wards. I could share God's Word with Frances. I could pray for her. I didn't know what to expect. I figured she probably would never recognize me, but maybe. It was something new.

It was something new for Frances as well. She wanted to be home. She expected to go back home, but that wasn't an option any more. It was something new for Frances to be there. But the longer she stayed, that new place became something old, something familiar.

I can maybe even say that my visits with her eventually became something old, something familiar. Yes, they were pretty much one sided conversations. A few times I heard comments about her gardening and her house. I would bring up Max, her kids, Glen and June Hamblin, bowling, her church, just to see if it would trigger her to say something. I would just talk to her. It didn't matter if the topics were old or new, I would tell Frances. Then I would share John 3:16 with her, something that I hoped would be old, familiar, to her, and I would pray for her. Even as I shared the old, the familiar, I was always hoping to hear something new from her, some memory that maybe she could share with me, some joke that maybe she heard, what kind of food she liked, anything.

Then Monday of this week there was something new. I found out Frances had passed away. Something new happened for Frances. She had been in a fog for more than two years, a fog caused by her dementia. Sometimes she could remember who you were, but sometimes she couldn't. Sometimes she could remember her house and her gardening, but sometimes she couldn't. Then, on November 20, she fell asleep. When she awoke, it was something new! The fog was gone. Her mind completely and totally restored. She awoke in the kingdom of the God who she loved, the God she hoped and trusted in, the God who loved her so much as to give up his one and only Son to save her, so that she could have this moment when everything was new again, when everything was fixed, when she was made new.

But not only was she made new, she also had something old, something familiar, now with her. She is now with Max, her husband. She is with her family who got there before she did. She is with her God that she had known her whole life, the God who had adopted her in baptism, the God she believed in. She now dwells with God, and God dwells with her and both of them with Max and all other believers who have gone on before them.

Everything is now new for Frances and it will stay that way. Never again will her mind suffer from dementia. Never again will her body give way and fail her. For Frances, the old order of things has passed away and God has made her new. And God promises that he will completely renew her body on the Last Day when he raises all the dead back to life.

If this is a comforting picture for you, then don't let it just be happy thoughts. God is offering to you right here and right now that same water of life that he gave to Frances and to Max to make them new. It doesn't matter what you have done. It doesn't matter who you are. God loves you just as he loves Frances, enough to give up his one and only Son.

God holds out this water of life for you without cost. He paid the price with the life of his Son. He did this to make Frances new, to make you new. He did this so that the old order of things, this order of death and mourning and crying and pain would themselves pass away. God makes you new, free from all of these things so that he can and will wipe every tear from your eyes.

We know that God did this for Frances and will do this for us because he said so. He has never broken a promise, and, quite frankly, he can't. This is why he recorded these words for us. This is why he assures us that his words are trustworthy and true. Everything in this life will eventually become old and pass away. But God will make us new, never again to die, never again to mourn, never again to cry, never again to have pain. God made Frances new. God will make us new as well through the gift of his Son. Amen.

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