

“What’s New”

Reading: *Isaiah 65:17-25; Luke 24:1-12*

Written and preached by [Luke Richards](#)

My daughter Junia is seven months old, and in this last week she discovered something amazing and mind blowing. You could see it on her face: she was awestruck. This vision of rapture was, of course, just a box of Cheerios. But for Junia, it was something new and incredible and very yellow, which seems to catch her attention these days. It’s been fun seeing that happen regularly as she grows and explores and learns about the world, but it’s also very refreshing. Everything is new to her. *Really* new, new in the sense that not only has she never seen this thing before, she’s never even conceived of anything *like* this thing; it didn’t even occur to her that such a thing could exist, even though we’re only talking about something as mundane as a box of Cheerios.

It’s exciting to be with her through that sort of growth, but it’s also a convicting reminder of how quickly and easily we get jaded as we grow up. Junia’s excitement at discovering a box of Cheerios prompts me to ask myself when the last time was that I stood in awe of something truly new. How long have I looked at the world through weary eyes, eyes that claim to be wise but are in reality just bored because they think they’ve seen it all already? Do I fail to see new things because in my cynical reaction to the evils of the world I lose my expectation of newness? When was the last time I saw something really new, something my eyes had never seen before and never expected to see? Do I even know what *new* means?

We so easily get worn down by the same old things, the wrongs that happen over and over again, the expectations that get let down, the hopes that get dashed. Is there anything new to see in a world such as this, where suicide bombings and mass shootings are routine, where good people so often live without hope, where madness runs amok? When was the last time you saw something truly new? We’re surrounded by the old, familiar, soul-grinding futility and evil of our world. Even when things don’t fill us with a sense of wrongness that leaves us crying out for newness, at best we only find upgrades or rebrandings of what we already know; it’s nothing new. For example, how often do you find a product that is genuinely new? Occasionally someone will invent something that is disruptive and game-changing, but it’s still not really new. Like the iPhone, that has massively changed communication in less than ten years: it didn’t do anything truly *new* when it came out, it just took existing ideas and technology and put them together in a better way than anyone had done before. At best, we see an evolution, an upgrade, a repackaging, a refinement, a next step from what we’ve already seen. When was the last time you saw something *new*, something as awe-inspiring as a Cheerios box to a seven-month-old?

“Is there anything of which one can say, ‘Look! This is something new’? It was here already, long ago; it was here before our time,” the writer of Ecclesiastes tells us. “What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun.” What’s worse, according to that ancient philosopher, everything is meaningless, it’s pointless, because nothing lasts, nothing matters, and even worse, injustice abounds and doing good so often accomplishes nothing. Modern philosophers were hardly the first to feel a sense of existential angst, and modern society is hardly the first to struggle with feelings of futility and powerlessness. Ecclesiastes was written at least 2500 years ago, and five hundred years before that, a Babylonian poet wrote, “In my youth I tried to find the will of my god...but I was pulling a yoke in worthless slavery...I have looked around in the

world, but things are turned around. The god does not impede the way of even a demon." A thousand years before even that, an Egyptian wrote, "To whom can I speak today? People are contented with evil; goodness is rejected everywhere...Death is in my sight today like the recovery of a sick man, like going out into the open after a confinement."

As we grow older and see that even demons go about their business unchallenged, and nothing ever changes, and everything is topsy-turvy, and death might even seem like an appealing option to some people, what newness is there to see? When was the last time you saw something *new*? Not just something rebranded or repolished or upgraded, and not just something that entertained or titillated or distracted you, but something new and truly unexpected?

Hundreds of years before Jesus, the prophet Isaiah wrote sermons on the problems facing his society, and his words still remind us today that "there is nothing new under the sun." We're still faced with the same sorts of problems Isaiah's people had thousands of years ago. There is a wrongness in the way things happen, and happen again, and don't seem to change, and that's nothing new. What are some of the things that need to be done away with that Isaiah mentions in the passage we read? Pretty much everyone should be able to find at least something in Isaiah's list that they would identify as being wrong. People die before their time. Whether young or old, lives are cut shorter than they should have been. We don't even have to try to define how long a life should be; far too often we get that bitter feeling of grief that a person's life *should* have been longer, and it's not right, and it wears us down.

Isaiah mentions how some people build houses and plant fields, but others live in them and enjoy their fruits. Too often peoples' lives are consumed by soul-crushing toil: not just hard work, but meaningless toil, the sweat of futility that leaves you anxious as to whether you will have enough. We can argue about what economic or legislative steps need to be taken to fix the inequality in our world, but the problem is there, and it's not new, and it grinds at our souls. There's injustice in our lives, there's injustice in our work, and there's injustice in the natural world around us: nature is "red in tooth and claw," as Tennyson famously put it. Wolves feed on lambs, and serpents are hardly content with dust.

And maybe worst of all, there is the ultimate question of whether we are alone in a godless universe. When we cry out to the heavens, is there anyone up there listening? Is life ultimately a cruel trick played on us by an uncaring, impersonal cosmos? Do suffering and pain mean anything, really, and is there any real hope? Is the only meaning in life whatever absurd, pitiful meaning we can concoct for ourselves? If space is truly an endless, bleak vacuum, the injustices of life become that much harder to bear.

The good news is that in our reading for today, Isaiah mentions all of those as being things that will no longer exist when God is finished. "See," the Lord says, "I will create new heavens and a new earth!" At last, the hope of something truly *new*! God is *creating* again. "The former things will not be remembered!" He says. The soul-crushing injustices and wrongs of life have no place in this new creation. It will be *new*. Not papered-over. Not polished or rebranded. Not even upgraded. *New*. An act of creation that only God can accomplish. When was the last time you saw something new like that? If you're watching, you'll see it.

God's promise of a new creation comes after several chapters of conversation in the book of Isaiah. Many of the sixty-odd chapters prior to this are chock full of messages blasting the people for their many sins against God and one another, and then proclaiming the consequences of those choices. There have been promises of rescue and forgiveness before this, but this is a new creation, a new beginning, something totally unexpected and different. The conversation that our reading is part of begins in chapter 63, where Isaiah begins telling stories about the "days of old," reminiscing about those beloved stories of God's miraculous salvation of His people in the past. And the question is asked: where are you now, God? Why don't those sorts of things happen anymore? Chapter 64 then begins with these words: "O that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains would tremble before you!" It's that old cry that so many of us have at different times: "God, if you're up there, please help me!" Come and do for me the things I've heard about in those old stories.

And then in chapter 65, just before the passage we read, God responds, "Here I am, here I am." He arrives, He comes, He's not holding back. Except: "I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me; I was found by those who did not seek me." People have been begging Him to come, but when He arrives, He finds "an obstinate people," people who are determined to go their own ways, who only want a God who doesn't interfere with what they want to do, and they think they're too good for God when He shows up.

This is it, folks. This is the story of Jesus, written centuries before Jesus was born. There is nothing new under the sun. This is exactly how people responded to Jesus when He came, and how many people respond to Jesus even today; there's *still* nothing new under the sun. And God's ultimate response to our obstinacy and foolishness and pride and sin is this: "Behold, I will create a new heavens and a new earth." The old will pass away. It won't be remembered any longer. The world that is scarred and weeping with the consequences of our sin will be re-made. There's nothing new on earth under the heavens, so God is creating a new heavens and earth.

When was the last time you saw something new? Today, on Easter, we see something new. This is not the same old same old. This is not just a coat of polish on what you've seen before. This is the beginning of a new creation, beginning with the defeat of death because of the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the firstfruit from among the dead: He was the first to be given a newly-created resurrection body that cannot be touched by death again, but He will not be the last. He conquered death and hell to usher in that new creation promised by Isaiah. We're waiting for the rest of it, but the creation has already begun, a creation in which the old things will pass away and will not be remembered any longer. Death has been and will be abolished, and with it will go all those other old wrongs that wear our souls down to death.

So when was the last time you saw something truly *new*? Let's take it a step further: would you like to *be* made new? Because the empty tomb of Jesus Christ presents you with a choice: if you're content with the same old same old, so be it, but the new creation is coming, and you're invited to be a part of it. For now, you can choose to keep living in the old creation if you want, but when the new creation is so much better, and when that new creation is promised to be completed soon, and when that new creation is already breaking into our world so that you can I can begin living in it now, why would you want to live in the old?

Would you like to be made new? Because if you want newness, if you want a foretaste of that new heaven and new earth, you will only find that in Jesus Christ, who is the Lord and King of that new creation. What newness do you need? What old wrongs have been grating at your soul that you need relief from? In this new creation that began at Christ's empty tomb, the old things will not be remembered. They're replaced by things like hope, forgiveness, faithfulness, and life that cannot be touched by death or disease. Those old things are healed in the presence of the Risen One who teaches us how to live in humility, forgiveness, beloved community, and sacrificial love.

Christ is risen! This is a new thing, and it leads to a new life for those who follow Christ, and it invites us into a new community that is a foretaste of that new creation inbreaking. Christ is risen! Praise Him!



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-Share Alike 2.5 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/2.5/)