

**Christ Presbyterian Church  
Edina, Minnesota  
January 1, 2012  
Dan Anderson  
One New Thing  
John 7:37**

**One New Thing Part I**

I remember arriving home one chilly January night following an event at church. Dad was driving and we kids were piled in the back of the station wagon. As we pulled into the driveway, we noticed a car parked in front of the house. We couldn't see anyone inside because the windows were all frosted over. Ernie and Lillian, who had come to talk with my Dad about getting married, were inside that car -- making out. Now let me tell you a bit about Lillian and Ernie. Ernie was probably in his later 70s, Lillian in her mid-70s. Both had suffered the pain of losing a spouse and now they had found new love -- hot and passionate, enough to steam up the car. "At our age," Ernie said, "we don't have time to wait around -- and we want to get married." As a kid, I thought it was a bit gross -- old people acting like teenagers in love. Now as an adult, with a bit of life seasoning, I now know they were experiencing the wonder and joy of a new beginning. After the pain of loss, they had found love again. God had poured on them a wonderful blessing. It was a brand new day.

At the start of this New Year I wonder, what blessing might we need from God? Where do we need a new start?

On the cover of the bulletin we find these words from the Apostle Paul: *If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!*

Inside the bulletin is a quote from Jesus: *"Let anyone who is thirsty, come to me and drink."* (John 7:37)

On this 1<sup>st</sup> day of the New Year, what **one new thing** do you need from God? One place in life where you need God to pour out a blessing?

As a young seminarian, I was assigned to St. Joseph's hospital in St. Paul to learn about pastoral care. I remember walking into the chaplain's office carrying my Bible for the first day of patient visits. The chaplain took a look at the Bible and said, "Leave that here." When I asked why, he said, "People may view that as a club or you may want it as a crutch. If you have something to share, share from your heart." So, feeling just a little intimidated, off I went to visit patients -- without my Bible.

One of the folks I met on that first day of hospital rounds was Eleanor. Eleanor had been diagnosed with cancer -- and in those days the treatment was almost as brutal as the disease; patients spent a long time in the hospital and the prognosis was usually grave. Over the next few weeks, Eleanor and I got to know each other quite well. I learned about her family and she learned

about mine. We talked about why I was at the hospital and about my preparations for ministry. She shared some of her fears and regrets -- and we talked about faith. One day, after we had enjoyed several visits, she said, "God seems so far away. It seems like there is a wall between me and God and I can't get through. I wish I could be sure about my faith. I wish I could be sure about heaven."

I told her the Bible teaches that we can be sure about faith and heaven, that if we ask for forgiveness and if we ask God to live in us, God will remove all the junk and make us clean. I also told her that whoever believes in Jesus will have eternal life. "This gift, Eleanor, is available to any person who asks." She said she would think about it.

The next time I stopped in her room, Eleanor was beaming. "I am so glad you came," she said. "What's up? Did you get good news? Are you going home?" I asked. She told me that she had asked God to forgive her failures and to live in her life -- and she said, "You know what? The wall is gone!"

Eleanor needed a new beginning. She needed Jesus to forgive and wash her clean. She needed the assurance of God's presence in her life. *If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!*

At the start of the New Year, what blessing do you need from God? Where do you need a new start? Could it be the freshness that comes from God's cleansing and forgiveness?

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Linda was in a disappointing marriage. Her husband was a non-participant at home and had been spending much too much time with alcohol. Linda was discouraged and on her way toward depression. For a time she moved out of the house and into an apartment, but that did not help her to feel any better.

She talked with a pastor, a counselor, a friend -- and she talked with God. Finally she made the choice to move back into the house -- and to take care of herself. One thing Linda began to do was journal. She started what she calls a *Gratitude Journal* and began every day to write five things for which she is grateful. More than a year later, she is still writing -- and although she is not happy about her relationship, she is caring for herself and has a whole new attitude about life! The darkness has passed.

Linda needed a new perspective and God has been transforming her from the inside out. She needed a new outlook and God gave it to her.

Jesus said, "*Let anyone who is thirsty, come to me and drink.*"

At the start of the New Year, what blessing do you need from God? Where do you need a new start? Could it be that you need God to bring you a fresh outlook?

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Some of us have experienced great loss this past year -- loss of a job, loss of a dear family member, changes in health, relationships that have fractured. In the last few weeks I have talked with two elderly couples who find themselves sleeping in separate locations for the first time in 70 years! In one case, she needs more care than he can provide at home; in the other, he needs more care than she can provide. Now they are sleeping in different locations and deeply saddened by this change in life.

Sometimes in sadness, we don't need a *fix*, we just need a kind Shepherd to hold us for a while in arms of tenderness and to whisper in our ear, "*It will be all right. I am here. I will never leave you or forsake you.*"

At the start of this New Year, what **one new thing** do you need from God? Do you need courage to face a daunting future? Forgiveness for misdeeds of the past? Healing in a broken place? The tender embrace of a Gentle Shepherd?

Jesus said, "*Let anyone who is thirsty, come and drink.*" "*Test me, and see*" writes the prophet Micah. "*Test me, and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.*"

As Stefan leads us in the next song, let these words of this song be our prayer, our request to a gracious and giving God. *Lord, God, we want to drink, drink You deep.*

## **One New Thing, Part II**

When the Shepherds met the baby in Bethlehem, they were overwhelmed with joy, and as they stepped away from the manger, they told everyone they met about their amazing encounter with God (Lk 2: 17). God had done for them what they could not contain.

When a man who was born blind was touched by Jesus and given sight, he could not keep quiet. The authorities questioned his veracity and tried to discredit his testimony, but the man would not be silenced. He had to share what had happened -- he wanted other people to see his Jesus.

When John the Baptist introduced Andrew to Jesus, Andrew was so moved that he ran to find his brother Simon and brought him to Jesus. What had happened to Andrew was too good to keep bottled up inside.

When we are touched by God, when God pours a blessing on us, we cannot keep it to ourselves. We have to pass it on.

The Scripture on the bulletin cover which began, *If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!* goes on to say, *All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ **and gave us the ministry of reconciliation**.* God touches us and then gives us the privilege of touching others.

The quotation from Jesus printed inside the bulletin began, "*Let anyone who is thirsty, come to me and drink*" and then goes on to say, "*Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, **rivers of living water will flow from within them.***"

When God pours in us with the life-giving Spirit, there is an overflow that spills out, like a river from within, which brings life and blessing to those in its path.

We first asked, *At the start of this New Year, what **one new thing** do you need from God?* Our second question is this: *As we look into the year before us, what **one new thing** might we offer back to God?*

Earlier I mentioned that my father was a pastor. Not only was my Dad a pastor, but both my mom and my dad's fathers were pastors. When I was a young boy, we would sometimes spend summer vacations at my grandparent's home in Connecticut, and they would take us to Sunday School at their church. Ruby was the first and second grade Sunday School teacher, and she was terrific! She loved Jesus and her love for Jesus could be seen in the way she loved her students.

Something rather unusual happened with our family. Several years after my grandfather moved to serve a congregation in New Hampshire, my father became the pastor of that church in Connecticut, and Ruby was still teaching first and second graders. She still loved Jesus and she still loved telling young children about Jesus.

You see, when God pours his love into our hearts, that love wants to spill out in service to others. When our own daughters were born, I wondered if they might one day learn in Ruby's class -- and while she did get to meet our first daughter, when our children reached first and second grade, my father was no longer a pastor at that church.

Ruby never got tired of serving children. She had been touched by God and wanted others to know how much they were loved by Jesus.

Is serving children the **one new thing** that you might offer in gratitude to God? Perhaps serving children is not your gift, but what is? What one new thing might you offer in service to God in the coming year?

Did you see the story about Vicie Williams in the *Star Tribune* on December 12? Born in the projects of Chicago, abused by her stepfather and pregnant at 12, Williams dropped out of school in seventh grade and ran away to Florida. By the time she was 20, she was the mother of three.

Hoping for a better life for her children, Vicie brought them to Minnesota, where, at age 24, she graduated from Kennedy High School in Bloomington.

After one of her sons was killed for refusing to join a gang, Vicie felt hopeless. A downward spiral led to two stints in prison -- one for drug abuse, the other for forgery. Her children were taken from her.

While in prison, she underwent rehabilitation for drug abuse and she researched fruit flavored barbecue sauces. When she was discharged in 2007, she had \$160 to her name. She began selling baskets with bath products and scripture on the Nicollet Mall. Someone anonymously donated \$2000 to her daughter, which the daughter shared with her mother. Vicie used that money to buy supplies and experiment with various BBQ sauces. *Kids Against Hunger* gave her kitchen space to develop her sauces. She made simple labels that she affixed to the jars - "*Sister Chris's Fruit-Flavored BBQ Sauce*" - and peddled her product at farmers' markets, on the bus, and on the streets. An attorney helped her write a business plan. *Small Sums* gave her \$500 to pay for liability insurance and to keep her website and phone bills up to date -- and today, (picture) you can buy her products at 22 Lunds' and Byerleys' locations.

I confess that I don't know any of the people involved in this story, but it seems to me that folks who had been blessed, gave to Vicie from the richness of their blessing.

This is what happens with followers of Jesus. Touched by God's Spirit, filled with God's goodness, the love of Christ spills over, bringing life to those in its path.

How has God touched your life? With what gift has God blessed you? Do you have medical skills? Mechanical aptitude? Business savvy? A gift of hospitality? The talents to teach with clarity? Expertise in financial planning? Artistic flair? What gifts has God given to you?

Look around -- at work, in your neighborhoods, at church, at school, where you live and play. Pay attention to the opportunities in your path. How might you, how might we, give back to God in 2012? What is **one new thing** we might offer in service to God in the coming year?

I cannot begin to know all that God wants from us. I only know that, when we are filled by Christ, a life giving stream flows from the church and changes the world around us.

*"Test me in this," says the Lord Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it." (Malachi 3:10)*

*The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.*