

Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing. Even now it is springing forth (the Baptism of Jesus, January 2020, Isaiah 43 v 18)

The gospel today tells us about an open heaven. What is it, or what might it be? It's a metaphor, if metaphor isn't too weak a word, that is constantly being used in the Bible. There is a ladder between heaven and earth, and we can go up and down it, Jacob's Ladder. The Curtain of the Temple is ripped in two at Jesus' death so that there is no longer a distinction between God's things and human things. Heaven has been emptied, because heaven is now down here with us. It's in our world that Jesus is baptised, and the whole world itself is baptised with him. Do not consider the things of old, says God. I am about to do a new thing. Look. It is just starting to happen.

Where do you hear and see this word, this new thing, in your life?

I want to tell you two stories from my week. Not just because I am totally self-centred, which, of course, I am. But because I want you to hear me answering the question that I want you to answer too.

I didn't see my new granddaughter, Eva, on the day she was born, Monday, but I was there at the house to greet mother and baby as they arrived home from hospital, triumphant, sore and exhausted, on Tuesday lunchtime. After about half an hour, it became perfectly obvious to me that my task was to remove Leo from the house for as long as I could. Leo is almost 4 and over enthusiastic. I reminded Leo that Sainsburys sells chocolate and when we got there, made sure that we took a long time choosing. Then we went to the café in the park where I had a long cup of tea and Leo played games on my phone. Then the swings, followed by the duck pond and one or two more places, and after 2 hours an anxious call came, 'where are you?'

But what I want to share with you is how I felt in the park. I was doing something that I knew I absolutely had to do, and I was doing it in the right place. Which meant that I was much more keenly in the present moment than I normally am. I was not regretting the past. I was not worrying distractedly about the future. My cup of tea tasted much better than usual; the trees were far more beautiful than normal; the dogs were more athletic; the smiles on all the faces around me more generous. I was inhabiting that wonderful place that I don't inhabit often enough, the present moment. There's a famous book called 'the Power of Now'. Nowhere is more powerful than now. You should try going there someday. Then we went back home, sat on the bed with mother, big sister and baby, and had one of those fantastic conversations that most of the time we feel far too busy to have.

Story number 2. When I arrived home alone that night alone, my wife having left me for the baby, there were various messages on the Ansa phone. Two of them were to tell me that the Inland Revenue had put out a warrant for my arrest and suggesting a number to ring to get me out of gaol. Have you ever had such a message like that? I found it faintly amusing. A vulnerable elderly person might not have. Then, by coincidence, Amazon Prime phoned at 8 in the morning to tell me that my discontinuing of the account 2 weeks before hadn't worked and offering to cancel the money I owed them if I followed a certain procedure. After half an hour of convincing me that they were Amazon Prime they got to the point of

asking me for my bank details, at which point I put the phone down. They rang me 3 more times that morning. Then, as I was actually writing this sermon, I got a call to tell me that the internet was going to be cut off in 24 hours unless I pressed a particular button on my phone.

I have also laid before you a picture of two worlds – the wonderful world of the present moment, the new thing that is even now breaking from the bud that the Bible tells us about, and the world of tiredness, cynicism and dishonesty. And this little Eva, who if she resembles my mother, will live to 2120; which of those worlds is she going to inhabit? Of course, she is going to inhabit both worlds. But which world will define who she is? I would love to have a proper conversation with the nice young Indian men who are always on the phone. And ask, 'what happened to you? Was the world ever fresh and new and good for you? What went wrong? You sound nice. Why are you now a thief?'

What is going to happen to us all, and to our children and grandchildren? Now, perhaps more than at any other time, if there is a new thing that is breaking from the bud, we have got to search for it. And that is what a community of faith, a church, is for. To search together for this new thing. If we don't search, we will just live in the tired old world. We will need resources from wherever we can find them for our Christian tradition to rise again from the dead. And to listen to new voices from completely surprising places. But a word of warning. It's not going to be like anything we have seen before, if Isaiah is to be believed. Father Stephen told me this week that there are one or two people in his congregation who think that if only we introduced guitars and loud music into church, young people would flock back in. They won't.

Sometimes people come up to me and say, 'I didn't understand your sermon. Couldn't you preach sermons that we do understand.' Or, 'Tell us what you meant today.' When I meant exactly what I said.

You see we have got to change in order to hear the new voice. We have got to allow ourselves to be undone. We haven't got to learn to hear difficult things. We have got to learn to hear easy things, which we are too sophisticated, or too distracted to listen to:

The compelling word of God, which all too often we are not compelled by, which enables us to discover the power of the present moment, in which we are invited to become fully alive. The new thing, which even now, is breaking from the bud. Amen.