

What Now, What's Next?

We are in a season of great change. Most of us do not love the idea of change, yet here we are, changing our year, our government, our lifestyles, our church leadership, our sports, our schools and our idea of what is normal. We can take comfort in verses such as Hebrews 13:8 which states *"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever"* or Malachi 3:6a: *"I the Lord do not change"*. So, it makes one wonder *"Why must I/we experience so much change all at once?"* Isaiah 43:19 says it best, *"See I am doing a new thing! I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland."*

As we anticipate even more change, both as a church and within government, it can make us wonder, *"who really is in charge?"* If I hold God to His word and He expresses that He is doing a new thing, that He is making a way in the wilderness and will make streams flow in what is wasteland, then I can confidently say I want to be part of that. I want to be part of something good, and something that is impossible without a God like ours. A God with a plan even before we knew we needed one.

As we say *"good-bye"* to Max, the one who has shepherded the flock that was entrusted to him for so many years. We say thank-you for his shepherding for what Locust Grove needed for the many years he was with us. Now we have a new leader. One gifted to lead Locust Grove for what lies ahead. He is not Max but gifted with spiritual gifts for what God intends for the *"new thing"* He is doing. We too have been equipped with special talents and spiritual gifts that He is hoping we will use for our very own personal assignments. These talents and gifts are exactly the tools we need to impact the world we live in right now.

Looking at the world around us, the policies being made and the actions being taken by the government leaders, we can wonder *"What in the world (literally) is going on?"* For the past several weeks and even months we watched, discussed, fasted and prayed. We pleaded with God to save this nation from tyranny and corruptness. Yet, we watch as LGBTQ+ rights and agendas are moving forward at lightning speed. Abortions are becoming legal even up to minutes after giving birth. Boys (identifying as girls) can now enter any bathroom and/or locker rooms of their choice or even to shower with the girls in their locker rooms. Boys can enter girls' sports if they so choose thereby pushing our girls out of their own sport. Where is the justice? Where are the equal rights? Where is the respect for male and female and morality? Is all lost? Or does it just feel that way. The tsunami of injustice and corruption coming at us can feel overwhelming.

In the past several weeks and months I have heard some saying *"Now what?"* *"it appears as all is lost."* I have heard many comments stating that *"Jesus is coming soon"* (and I don't question that) *"and I hope it's real soon."* Or, *"How much worse can it get?"* Unfortunately our physical world can get a lot worse. But what if Jesus continues to tarry or delay? The Jews said He was coming back soon right after He went to heaven. That was over 2000 years ago. We do see much of Revelation unfolding before our eyes, and while that can give us hope, it can continue to unfold for many more years. Paul told the Thessalonica church that *"times and dates we do not know, for we know that Jesus will come like a thief in the night, suddenly He will come. Destruction on the unrighteous will come suddenly and they will not escape."* (1 Thess. 5:1-3) To the believer this is great comfort but what if one of the *"unrighteous, unbelievers"* is one of your family or friends or acquaintances?

I was talking with someone the other day about this and she broke down and cried. She told me that many of her family members and friends are unbelievers. Even more painful is that they will not talk to her because she has a different point of view on what is going on in our world right now. How about you? Do you have family, friends and even

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...with all your heart, soul, mind...
Matthew 22:37-40

coworkers that will not talk to you because you do not have the same perspective with life right now? I have seen family relationships fractured and friend relationships cracked, some will not even be in the same room together, because of different ways of thinking about current events and crises. Paul had hard words for the Corinthian church because they were allowing divisions among themselves on things that “weren’t the main thing”. They were distracted by the “stuff of life” that pulled them away from the teaching of the true Gospel. I encourage you to read through just 1 Corinthians if you want to see his harsh words. He really was somewhat brutal. Yet it was necessary in order to get them back to being focused on God.

The fear of death permeating our culture and even the world around us has been an eye opener for me. How did we as Christians get here? Don’t get me wrong. I don’t want death any sooner than Christ ordained it for me. But let me be real, I have a cup of coffee, a plate of nachos and a piece of chocolate cake waiting for me. There’s going to be a feast without this body suffering and I’m looking forward to it! However, I would really like to see my kids get married and hold my grandbabies before then. I would really like to hear them say “grammy, come play with us” too. But we are also told that each day has been ordained for us before there was even 1 (Psalms 139). I can’t add 1 day or take 1 away from His already laid out plan. Paul told the Corinthian church, “when the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true, “death has been swallowed up in victory.” “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death is your sting?” and to the Thessalonian church, “we are not in darkness that the day should overtake us like a thief. We are sons and daughters of *the light*, so let us not sleep as others do, but let us be *alert and self-controlled*...since we are of the day, having put on the breastplate of FAITH and LOVE, and the HOPE of salvation (or the promise of heaven as believers in Christ) ...therefore, encourage one another and build up one another.” Italics mine (1 Thess 5:4-11).

Let’s look again at the questions, “What now? What happens next?” I have been asking this myself for my own life for about 3 years. I have contemplated returning to school, going back into nursing, getting a J.O.B. although my husband would tell you I have 3 or 4. I have watched ever so closely the last 5 years what has been happening in our world. I have been more intrigued by politics and law than I ever was in school. (Sorry Miss Kauffman. I know you tried.) But the nagging question has been, “Where and how can I make a difference”? Honestly, we have expected politicians and the government to make this place a safe home for us without so much as lifting a finger. I have been very convicted of that. We pray. And we must. But what about “faith without works is dead”, what does that mean in influencing government and culture? I was recently talking to a pastor friend about all this. I know what my purpose is, our purpose, we call it the Great Commission, “GO therefore, (as you are going) make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo (don’t forget) I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:18-20). This is **our** purpose; we don’t have to be called to another country, just our home, out our back door and beyond. What does that look like in everyday life though? This pastor friend said to me, “We all have assignments within that purpose. In life, sometimes those assignments change.” Light bulb! Yes, for a season, I was an RN working crazy hours, sometimes with crazy people. That assignment changed, suddenly, but still changed. I became a stay-at-home mom and wife. Despite the surprise, I wouldn’t change it for the world. My kids are grown and just about all on their own now. Now what? What’s next?

Are you struggling? A stirring within so to speak? God has given us talents that we can develop. These talents can make someone a beautiful artist, a successful farmer, a cook of delicious and beautiful food, or a designer of beautiful things. But we as believers are also given spiritual gifts. That is how we function in the Body of Christ but also the world/culture around us to make an impact for His glory. It is what makes each of us unique, not only to the purposes of God but to the assignment of God in each season of our life. I hope that makes sense. If you don’t know your primary spiritual gift/s, I would encourage you to get Don & Katie Fortune’s book, Discover your God-Given Gifts. It’s our recommended read for February. It is easy to read and I’m quite certain you will finish with a much greater understanding of not just yourself but others within the Church.

I have come to appreciate change, even unexpected change. I have found exciting NEW things from God in those changes if I am open to see it. Our Government? What if God was/is still hearing our prayers and He is uncovering and exposing corruption and immorality and this is a test of the Church to wake up, grow up and not give up in prayer and doing? If you ask me, I think that could be so. I am excited to see God continue to move there if we don't give up. As for the transition at Locust Grove? I am excited for that too. Not because 1 is leaving and another coming but because God is in the change here as well. Families and relationships? Let's keep looking to Christ and praying for healing in those broken and fractured places. Church, we are NOT defeated, we continue to pray and fight for righteousness, *"and not grow weary in doing good"*. I like the Good News Bible translation of 2 Corinthians 4:8, for we *"are often troubled, but not crushed; sometimes in doubt, but never in despair"*. We have the Hope of Christ. Let's move forward! *"O people, the LORD has told you what is good, and this is what he requires of you: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God."* (Micah 6:8)

"And now, may the Lord make our love increase and overflow for one another and for everyone else...May He strengthen our hearts so that we will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all His glory." 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13. Let's get busy Church, our "doing" is not over.

Blessings for a great new year in Christ,

Juanita