

Listening and Talking . . . by Rev. Tom Cici

Throughout October, as the fall season commences, we will also begin a new five-week sermon series. “Grateful for the Things that Unite Us” is designed to celebrate some of the good things that we are thankful for, and to open up our thinking about transformation in the church, in our lives, and our community/world. For instance, we might celebrate that we are broken, and yet this realization allows us to love all others and be loved. Also, we can be thankful for the opportunity to invite everyone to the Banquet, and yet experience the heartache of waiting for many others to accept the invitation and come to the Banquet.

As God says through the prophet Isaiah, “I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the



desert” (Isaiah 43:19 NRSV). I am quite certain that God is at work in us, through us, and as us. The only question is whether we can perceive what God is calling us toward and let go of those things that hold us back from pursuing that call with all our hearts, minds, souls, and strength.

If you have participated in church-life for any length of time, you may have certainly heard of at least one “new thing” that God would like to do in our midst. For instance, on more than one occasion and from several people, I have heard the interest in doing a perpetual mission trip right here in Bloomington/Normal which could include youth and adults. This ministry would be similar to other far away mission trips to Haiti or closer mission trips to Rippling Hope in Detroit, Michigan. The voices I hear from interested people say, ‘We only need someone or a group to organize this local ministry. It won’t cost as much as other mission trips and many more people can participate in it. We have hands and feet to do the jobs.’

What is most important is that this “new” call of interest is growing out of an “old” call of interest. There is a scripture passage we often think about during Advent: “A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch will grow out of his roots” (Isaiah 11:1 NRSV). We begin to see that God doesn’t plant a new tree but grows something new and vital from what has been as the foundation for what can come. What about our past can be the soil for our new growth as the people of God?

What forgotten dust can become the soil from which the beloved community of God can grow? I hope this new five-week sermon series, “Grateful for the Things that Unite Us,” throughout October 2 – 30, will open the door for conversations about transformation in our lives, our church, and our community. May we be aware of God’s continuing call to renewal and hope as we proclaim and live out God’s transforming love for the world.

Blessings on all as we Journey together