

God says, "See, I am making all things new."

How little I know about history. Next to nothing, in the grand scheme of things. This has been made abundantly clear to me this week in a couple of ways. The history lessons I learned this week made me feel like a very small cog in a very large wheel. And I guess that's appropriate.

Geoff Brown is writing a new book which will be released fairly soon about history; of this area, of our industries, about Trinity Church and interactions with other religions in our area. This is quite a thorough look at our local history. And there is so much of it that I didn't know, as I'm finding this out! I've been reading a pre-release form of the book.

Then we had an amazing guest at our Bible Study meeting this week. I wish you all had been there. Mr. Brett Goldberg is extremely knowledgeable about the cultures and languages of the middle East and how all the different peoples are connected. Did you know that the Jews share more DNA in common with the Kurds than they do with the Arabs?

I thought I knew something about Jewish history. I know next to nothing compared with this gentleman. We had nine people at Bible Study. We all were very happy to have been there. It was very eye-opening.

So, in preparing for this sermon I thought that my humbling experiences this week might be helpful in talking about All Saints Day, and in particular, all the saints. On that score too I have humbled by my lack of knowledge.

Our Second reading for today, a revelatory experience to John of Patmos, gives us the vision of the world of the future. It tells the end of the story of Christianity. John sees what God will do at the end of days. And so I guess it's very fitting that we heard from the last chapter of the last book of the Bible. It was revealed to John that God will create a new heaven and earth.

To help me make sense of this reading I found a commentary this week by René Such Schreiner. She is a professor at a seminary in Evanston Illinois. And I was surprised to discover that my study of the scripture for the day dovetailed with my experience of history last week when she said these few words. [Rather than] "being arbitrarily **pushed** through time by human actions, humanity is instead being **pulled** into time through God's loving intention."ⁱ (Emphasis is hers.)

The words intrigued me, but I had to ponder them for a while before seeing what she meant and seeing how the passage from Revelation leads her to say that.

So, I came up with an example that helped me. When being pushed through time we don't have much agency. Things happen around us. People are born, stuff happens to them and then they die.

It's like if you are at Disney World and you're on a ride like "It's a small world" or "Pirates of the Caribbean". You sit in a boat and you watch things as you go by them and then the ride ends. You can react with emotions; joy, fear, anticipation. But you are pushed along by the mechanical machinery and observe.

So, then what is life like if you are pulled into time by God's loving intention? Well, first of all, you have to make a choice to see that God's loving intention is always there. We can choose to accept God's invitations all along the way, or choose not to.

So, using the ride example again, maybe that's when you and I see something while we're sitting in the boat, and God makes it clear to us in some way, and we pull on our wading boots and get out of the boat and do something that bucks the trend, or changes the course of our personal trajectory. It's when a young boy or girl decides to take a different route through life despite the expectations of parents. It's when an entrepreneur like William H. Barnham says, "I'm going to build a church in Lime Rock," when others say to him, "but there's already an Episcopal church in Salisbury. Why would you do that?"

It's when Holy Women and Holy Men step out of their ordinary lives, called by God through the Holy Spirit to do something unexpected and perhaps very difficult. Joan of Arc comes to mind. She was a peasant girl who had spiritual visions and believed that she was called to save France from the civil war that was dividing the country. I bet her parents didn't exactly encourage that course of action for their daughter.

How about Dietrich Bonhoeffer who chose to join a plot to assassinate Adolph Hitler even though that was incredibly risky. He had already gone to the US to study briefly. A safer course of action that would have just stayed in the boat, stayed out of the fray, and just be pushed along by the tide of world events. Or how about Pauli Murray, a documentary has been made about her recently, she was the first woman African American Episcopal priest, and she broke many other barriers and stepped out to be the person God called her to be.

All these people felt Christ pull them out of their ordinary trek and leave normal expectations behind. They couldn't do otherwise. The pull of the vision of a better world; a new heaven and a new earth loomed large for them too, just as it had for John of Patmos, and they had to follow the Holy Spirit wherever she led.

And that brings us to Lazarus, the man who died, because, in his sisters' telling of it, Jesus was late showing up. What of Lazarus? He may have been pushed through life for his whole life, then the ride ended for him. But Jesus pulled him out of the normal course of events too. God called Lazarus back to life. Of course, Lazarus would die a normal death later, but there was more that Lazarus could do before that time.

Take a little time in our meditative moment of silence to think about how you have chosen to change your course of action, or a course change has come to you like it or not, and you held on to the hand of Jesus and let him pull you right into new life, and unexpected blessings.

Let's not just sit in the boat on the ride of life as it moves inexorably to the end of the ride. Like Jesus, calling the disciples out of their fishing boat, take his hand. Walk across the water.

ⁱ Schreiner, Rene Such, Commentary on Revelation 21:1-6a, WorkingPreacher.org, All Saints Sunday (Nov. 7, 2021)