

All Things New

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This week, I experienced something deeply transformational in my life. I became a Full Member Elder at the Annual Conference. It wasn't just a ceremony, but a moment that marked spiritual and personal renewal. The process wasn't easy, and it took time and effort, but it was made possible by God's grace and the support of many of you.

As you know, I was ordained in Korea years ago and had already undergone a similar ordination process. So when I started this journey in the U.S., I found myself wondering whether I truly needed to go through the same steps again. After all, hadn't I already been ordained? Yet, as I went through this process, I realized something important: though it seemed repetitive, it wasn't merely about crossing off a list of duties. It was about encountering God's grace in a new way—meeting new mentors, building relationships with fellow pastors, and deepening my connection to the ministry.

At the Annual Conference, I experienced two key moments of newness. The first came on the first day, when, through a vote from the pastors, I was recognized as qualified for ordination. Until that moment, I wore a yellow "Provisional" tag. But once I passed the vote, received the congratulations of my colleagues, and left the room, I was given a new name tag—one with the word "Elder" written in blue. Suddenly, I had a new identity, and I could participate fully in the conference's decisions, casting my vote with the other pastors.

The second moment occurred on the final day, during the ordination service. I had been through ordination before, but this ceremony felt different. It wasn't just a ritual; it was a joyous celebration of God's calling, a welcoming of new colleagues into ministry. As I stood before the congregation, with the red stole placed around my neck, I could feel the fullness of God's call on my life.

I had crossed a threshold, not by abandoning my past ordination but by embracing the fullness of God's grace, which had been at work in me all along.

In some ways, these moments of transformation and renewal mirror the message of our Scripture for today. We read in Revelation 21:1-6 about the new heaven and the new earth, a promise that God will make all things new. Psalm 148 calls all of creation to join in praise of God's transformative work. These Scriptures remind us that God's newness doesn't require a complete rejection of the past. Rather, God's grace works in our lives, transforming and redeeming the past for something better.

When I reflect on this, I think about yesterday's yard sale here at the church. It's a simple event, but it is a beautiful example of what it means for God to make all things new. We each had items—old things, perhaps forgotten or no longer needed—that we were ready to let go of. But to someone else, those things were treasures, new opportunities, and fresh possibilities. An item that seemed useless to one person became something valuable to another. The yard sale, in a way, reflects the very nature of God's transformation: God takes what seems old, worn-out, or useless in our lives and re-purposes it for a new and greater purpose. This is what God does for all of creation.

As we think about God's newness in our lives, I invite you to consider the ways that God is renewing your own past—not by erasing it, but by redeeming it and making it new. Just as the old items at the yard sale found new life in someone else's hands, so too does God take what is old, what has been painful or difficult, and reuses it for God's glory and purpose.

In Revelation 21:1-6, the apostle John describes a vision of the new heaven and the new earth, a vision of the ultimate renewal of all creation. John writes:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them and be their God; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away” (vv. 1-4).

This passage is a powerful image of what God is doing in the world. It is a vision of hope—a promise that, in the end, God will make all things new. The world as we know it, with all its pain and suffering, will be transformed. Death, sorrow, and mourning will be no more. In their place, God will bring a new reality—one of peace, joy, and the full presence of God with us. It is a newness that invites us to hope for a day when all things will be restored.

But here’s something important to notice: the new heaven and the new earth are not about completely abandoning what has come before. The “first heaven and the first earth” have passed away, but they are not erased. Instead, they are transformed. The new earth is built upon the foundation of the old. God does not throw away the past but makes it new, reworking it into something more glorious.

Similarly, in our lives, God does not ask us to completely abandon our past. Instead, God’s grace reworks and redeems our past, transforming it into something new and beautiful. We are not called to forget where we’ve come from, but to let God use those experiences to shape who we are becoming. Our old hurts, our struggles, and even our past mistakes are not discarded by God’s grace. Rather, they are part of the process of making us new. God takes what was broken, what was discarded, and turns it into something that can be used for God’s greater purpose.

In Psalm 148, we are reminded of the entire creation joining in praise of God. The psalmist calls upon the heavens, the earth, the creatures, and all people to praise God for what God has done and is continuing to do. Creation itself becomes a witness to the newness of God's grace. Just as yesterday's yard sale was a place where old items found new life, so too does God's creation sing of the redemption and renewal that is already at work in the world.

Just as we experienced yesterday with our yard sale, things that were once old and forgotten find new value in someone else's hands. We, too, can trust that God takes the old, the broken, the discarded parts of our lives and transforms them into something new. God doesn't erase our pasts; God redeems them, reuses them, and repurposes them for something greater than we could have ever imagined.

Friends, the new heaven and the new earth are not some far-off dream. They are breaking into our lives right now. God is at work making all things new, just as my ordination didn't mean abandoning my past, but embracing a fuller understanding of my calling. Similarly, we have already been made new in Christ. Our baptism marks the beginning of this newness, and the communion table is a place where we continually experience that grace. Yet, there is a fullness of God's grace that we have yet to experience. One day, we will stand before God's throne, and all things will be made fully new.

As we reflect on that great promise, let us remember the lessons of our yard sale. The things we thought were useless can be transformed and repurposed. So too with our lives—God does not discard us because of our past. Instead, God takes everything we are and redeems it for a new purpose. May we live in the joy and hope of that newness, trusting that God's grace is always at work in us, redeeming the old and making it new for God's glory. Amen.