

“I am about to do a new thing”  
Westminster Presbyterian Church  
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*Excerpts from Isaiah 43*

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Though I’ve only been your pastor for two and a half years, I have come to care deeply for our nursery school. My first memory is pushing through a crowded hall of parents and children to introduce myself to Tracy, as five other people jockeyed for her attention. I saw then that this wasn’t just a school. Love was taped on the walls as pictures in crayon and marker. Love was in the teachers’ smiles as they greeted the children. But most of all, love was in the faces of the children who felt at home in this place—this wonderful place that brought alive their imagination, and moral compass, and creativity, this place where they knew they were safe and wanted.

For two years, we fought for this school. We had meetings. We organized fundraisers and marketing campaigns. We tried new and creative programs. We even—Tracy, the teachers, and I—allowed ourselves to be pummeled with whipped cream pies for 20 minutes, as children hysterically, some might say “demonically,” laughed. But in the end, it was not enough. And I think that’s what’s so hard today. It’s not that the needs of parents changed. It’s not even that we’re closing. It’s that we worked so hard, poured so much of ourselves, our dreams, into this place, and still, it was not enough.

The prophet Isaiah today talks to a people who for 60 years have waited in exile, holding onto a distant memory of a burning city and temple. Some thought God had abandoned them.

Isaiah takes up his people’s lament, and having grieved, he invites them to look beyond this moment, to remember a long history full of moments like this one, when there seemed to be no hope. And he asks them to remember how those people, their ancestors, kept on walking, kept on singing, marching through a roaring river, through a blazing desert, to a horizon they could neither see nor fathom. They did so, not because their faith or efforts were enough to save them, but because God’s love was enough.

Isaiah reminds them that they are not first a people of settled cities and towering temples; they are a people of wilderness crossings, nomads who never stop dreaming, hanging on to manna in the desert, to scraps of hope that fill the belly for one more day, singing their way to kingdom come.

For such a people, there is never an ending, only a new beginning. To them, God declares, “I am doing a new thing.” I will lead you, God says, if you but trust me.

May we too receive these prophetic words today. It is not wrong to grieve. But let us remember that there was a time when members of this church were saying goodbye to something else dear and beloved, as they dared to dream with God and create one of Auburn’s first nursery schools.

We stand upon the same precipice, caught between what was and what will be. Today, we choose whether we shall be like Lot's wife, frozen in time as a pillar of salt, looking back, or whether we shall be like that hardy band of former slaves who crossed sand and rock to find tomorrow.

God is doing a new thing. Even as we close the doors of Westminster Nursery School, we open those same doors for our new REACH ministry, determined to reach the children and youth of this community who have been abandoned to the margins. It is a ministry for today, for single parents and working parents, for busy schedules and skeptic minds. It is a ministry that will invite LGBTQ youth, and children of all races with different abilities and disabilities, and foster kids, and so many others, to find here what children found for 66 years: a home where they know they are safe and wanted. It is a ministry that will take that faith out beyond those doors, into the woods, into the arts, into homeless shelters and soup kitchens, into prisons and hospitals, into all the hurting places waiting for a little manna in the desert. A little Westminster Nursery School love.

That love, being of God, does not end here. It only grows into something new. And you are a part of that. You are a part of what comes next. And, you know, I think that's enough. **Amen.**