

Commissioned Ruling Elder
Charge and Blessing
September 15, 2020
Rev. Joy Fisher

Brandon and Jane,

Welcome and congratulations! As you begin your *commissioned* ministry I would like to share with you Isaiah 43:19, "Behold I am doing a new thing. Now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?"

You are part of a new thing that God is doing in our presbytery. We've had a few commissioned ruling elders in the past, but this program really sprang up because God is doing a new thing in our churches -- and *you* are part of that new thing. Also, by calling *you* into commissioned ministry, God is doing a new thing in you!

This is a great verse, I think it gets us excited, because in one sense we like new things. New opportunities. New challenges. We can't wait to see, "What is this new thing God is doing?"

Originally, this word came to God's people during the time of the Babylonian exile. I wonder, in the midst of their world being turned upside down, in the midst of the chaos and confusion, I wonder what was it like to hear God say "Behold, I'm doing a new thing?"

People talk about these being "unprecedented times." It's not exactly the Babylonian exile, but in a lot of ways, our lives, our churches, everything is being upended in this time. We hear people saying, "I just want it to go back to the way it was."

So, what is it like, now, in the midst of this chaos and confusion, to hear God say: "Watch, I'm doing a new thing?"

On one hand, we like new things. On the other hand, we tend to be people of routine. We tend to do what we know, to fall back on the familiar. Especially in the church, we have a tendency to institutionalize and idolize, "the way we've always done it." This is truly a season of God doing a new thing in us and around

us. There's no falling back on the familiar. There's no holding onto the way we've always done things. You are entering into commissioned ministry in the church at a time when we're all upended and reeling and just trusting that God is in the midst of us, doing a new thing if we will perceive it.

Had you begun this ministry at a time when things were more "precedented," it may have been tempting for you to just come in and do what you know, just maintain things as they've always been. But right now, we're all being forced to stop, and listen, and pray, and discern, and ask God, "What are you doing?" And "What are you calling us to do?"

And so I share this verse with you as you begin this new season of ministry. My prayer is that you will hold onto the gifts we've received in this time in the years ahead. Gifts of waiting on the Lord, listening, and asking, Lord, what is this new thing you're doing?

Jane and Brandon, in order to get to the point of being commissioned today, you have studied and learned all the things that were required in order to be prepared for ministry, but there is never a time that you have all you need for ministry. There's never a time when you can say, "I've got this," or else you risk going on *your own* knowledge instead of listening for what new thing God is doing, what new thing God is requiring of you, what new gift, new grace God desires to give you.

Welcome to commissioned ministry in the church in the 21st century, where the church is changing, and ministry is changing. You have accepted God's call. May you also accept God's invitation – to trust, to submit, to delight in the new things God is doing -- in you, and around you, and through you.

Prayer: God you have made Brandon and Jane. In their baptisms you have called them and blessed them and given them gifts for ministry. We give you thanks for this calling you have given them, for the joy with which they have answered your call, for the work of discernment and preparation, and now for this day of commissioning. Bless Brandon as he pastors the Bethany flock. Give him energy and wisdom and leadership, give him the support he will need. Give him rest and refreshment. May this congregation be blessed as he serves them in your Spirit.

Bless Jane as she serves the pastors in this presbytery. Help her to set good boundaries and rely on the abundant support around her. Guide her as she envisions what her role should be. Give her love overflowing as she pastors your servants in need of care.

God of new things, we give you thanks, for the new things you are doing in our midst. We trust in your sure promises.