

Michael J. Mathey
Pentecost XI & Proper 16 (St. Bartholomew)
August 24, 2025
Text: Isaiah 66:18 – 23
Title: Now & Not Yet

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. One of the greatest TV shows of all time was MASH. Its final episode remains one of the most watched television events ever. Although the middle of a war was an ironic setting for a sitcom, the lasting endurance of MASH has proven that it worked. I remember watching the 4077th when I was a kid, and it is still one of my favorite programs today.

One of the episodes that aired after the arrival of Colonel Potter actually came to my mind as I was considering the beginning of today's sermon. Frank Burns approaches Colonel Potter with the ridiculous idea of auctioning off the camp's trash to the local Korean civilians in accordance with a directive from the Pentagon. With an expression that shows his contempt for such a ridiculous idea, the Colonel gives his approval for Burns to hold an auction to sell the camp's garbage. During the auction Frank Burns is addressing the Korean civilians in attendance, and in his hyper-patriotic way declares, "You have all had a chance to see the items up for bid, and you know that America throws away only the best."

"America throws away only the best." What an apt description for a country that has a reputation around the world as being "the throw-away society." Many people in poorer societies would pay dearly for much of what finds its way into our garbage dumps. My sister used to sell dumpster contracts for a garbage company in northern Indiana, and she would tell me about some of the items that were found and still in perfectly good working order, especially items from retail stores that could no longer be sold because of a minor scratch or flaw. My father

used to tell me how he was sent out to destroy brand new car stereos at the auto assembly plant that he worked at because they were no longer used in the newest model year.

Much of this waste is the result of our country's obsession with always having to have what is newer and better. How many of us have wanted to get something new, even though the old item still did what we needed it to do? Cell phones, TV's, and other technological toys are a perfect example of this in today's world. It's all a part of our American mindset to have things that are bigger, better, and newer.

But this mindset isn't limited to Americans in the twenty-first century. It has been a part of the human condition throughout the history of our fallen race. We are always looking at and desiring something more than what we have, even when we have all that we need we still want more. Consider again the account of Adam and Eve's fall into sin in Genesis 3.

The serpent tempted them with a number of different things. The most obvious was the forbidden fruit from the Tree of Knowledge. The Lord God had already given them everything that they could possibly need for food, but they decided that wasn't enough for them. God only told them to avoid one type of fruit from one tree, but with the help of the temptation from the serpent, Adam and Eve decided that they had to have what they wanted – what they coveted – they wanted something new. So they ate the fruit, and the results have been catastrophic.

The other thing that the serpent tempted them with was a false promise. He told them that when they ate the fruit they would become, "...like God, knowing good and evil," and they decided that that was something more that they wanted. They wanted to be like God. They wanted to be in control. The deception was that they already knew what was good and what was evil, whatever God said, but that wasn't enough for them. They wanted more. Their desire to be

like God was a desire to want something new that didn't really exist, and they forgot that what God said and provided was good and what He denied was evil.

This sinful desire of your human nature is illustrated time and time again throughout God's Word. The Lord God provided the children of Israel with food while they wandered in the desert, but they complained because they wanted something else. Their descendants lived in the Promised Land with God as the only ruler that they needed, but they wanted an earthly king so that they could be just like everyone else. The long-awaited Messiah finally appeared to the Jews, and He too was more than they could ever need. But He wasn't what they wanted, and so they arrested Him, falsely convicted Him, beat Him, and then they tortured Him to death on a cross because He wasn't what they expected and wanted the Messiah to be.

And we are guilty of the same sins still today because there is nothing new under the sun. We constantly strive to get more and more of what we want instead of being content with having what we need, and when we come across someone who is content with just having their needs met, we tend to look down on them and accuse them of being lazy or of having no ambition. Our sinful nature convinces us that we know better than God does, and so we justify our sinful actions and the sins of the world around us by declaring that God's Word is outdated on issues like homosexuality or the roles of men and women in the church.

We ignore what God has told us about Himself in His Word, and without even realizing it we make a false god to worship instead of the Triune God as He has revealed Himself to us. For example, many believe that since God is so loving He won't send anyone to hell, but that's not what He tells us about Himself and His judgment. The Lord God makes it abundantly clear that His wrath will be unleashed on the world when He decides that the time is right, and those who have no faith in Him will be condemned. To believe anything else is to make God out to be

something He's not, and to be guilty of idolatry in the process. Our sinful nature works very hard to get us to believe such lies, and the world around us with its constant desire for newer things, including new and more convenient gods, is a willing accomplice in that task.

But the Lord God knows you better than you know yourself, and so He has given you something new and He has promised you something more as well. The Old Testament reading from Isaiah 66 starts with that very idea, "For I know their works and their thoughts..." He knows full well that your sinful nature has a strangle-hold on who you are and how you live.

So knowing this, the Lord God has worked throughout history to bring us to the point where we can live a new and eternal life. That work, His work to make us new and to save us, culminated for the first time in the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ. By His death on the cross Jesus paid for the sins of all humanity. Nobody's sins were left uncovered by His blood, not yours, not mine, and not even the person who is home in bed right now because she still doesn't know who Jesus is and what He has done for her. No matter how bad you might think that your sins are; His blood was more than enough to pay for them and to give you a new life in Him. No one who hears and receives this Gospel message will be left out unless they choose to ignore and reject His precious and priceless gift of faith that is freely offered to them.

And this gift is made new again every time He comes to you through the means that He has chosen, His Word and His Sacraments. When we read and when we hear His Word read to us, His Holy Spirit comes to us to give and strengthen the faith that we need to be made new again. When we are washed clean each day by the promises connected to our first washing in Holy Baptism, our old, sinful self dies and a new self is born in its place. And when He comes to you in, with and under the simple elements of bread and wine, He strengthens and preserves your

faith in Him unto life everlasting. This is what He does for you now, at this very moment and throughout the week as you live the life that He has called you to live.

But there are promises of His that are not yet complete, and He tells us about them in today's reading from Isaiah. The Lord God says in verse 22, "For as the new heavens and the new earth that I make shall remain before me, says the Lord, so shall your offspring and your name remain...all flesh shall come to worship before me declares the Lord." When Christ came, these words were fulfilled for the first time by His sacrifice paying for all, but when He comes again as He promised to do, they will be fulfilled even more so. His return will bring judgment to this world, and then He will raise His faithful people from all of history to give them the glorified, resurrected bodies that He promised and we will live with Him in the new heaven and the new earth. It is then that the promise that He made through Isaiah will be fulfilled, all flesh will worship Him.

Until that time, He calls each of us to be His instruments, and to spread His Word about the new life that He has promised to all who are in Christ Jesus. The Lord God is leading us outside of these four walls, away from this property and maybe even outside of our comfortable and familiar homes to "...declare [His] glory among the nations." Answer His call in a new way, and be His instruments to the nations knowing His promise that even with your sin He will continue to make you new until He returns to make all things new on the Last Day. May that day come soon. Amen. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.