

Space for God's New Creation
A Sermon on Isaiah 65 by the Rev. Philip Major
St. Paul's ~ Syracuse, NY ~ November 16, 2025

One week ago, on Saturday night, we held a big party here at St. Paul's. We celebrated the accomplishments of the Open Doors renovation project. We thanked the people who led the effort for the past ten years. We are close enough to the end to look back and reflect on what was most important for the success of Open Doors, the largest renovation at St. Paul's in 65 years.

Open Doors was successful because of the tremendous generosity of our members in providing financial support for the project. Open Doors was successful because of the strong relationships our members have forged with the broader community and with partner organizations, like the Syracuse Orchestra. Open Doors was successful because it was led by a large, skillful group of people. Open Doors was successful because it was a team effort. Many faithful people, including many of you, worked together to bring the project to completion.

Open Doors was also successful because of something we failed to do. Looking back at the last ten years, one of the things that made Open Doors successful was the result of something we tried to do, but failed. The failure happened about seven years ago.

Seven years ago, we were in the planning stage. Seven years ago, we understood the project would include building an elevator in the Montgomery Street lobby. Seven years ago, we knew we would build a new entrance from the parking lot and replace the roofs of the Parish House.

But seven years ago we were struggling to find an answer to one very big question. What would happen to the second floor of the Parish House? Who would occupy the space? This was not a small question. The second floor of the Parish House is enormous. It has the space of four large houses.

We worked for several years to find an answer. We considered the possibility of turning the space into offices. We crunched the numbers for building low-income housing or market-rate housing. We consulted with experts.

In the end, none of our solutions were working. We couldn't make the numbers work. So the effort to obtain grants and pledges of support for Open Doors was launched with a giant question mark in the middle of our minds and in the middle of our grant applications. What would happen to the enormous, vacant space on the second floor of the Parish House? We worked on Open Doors for four years with this very large question in our minds.

In February of 2022, after we had raised more than \$2 million in grants and pledges, Betsy Elkins got together with her old friend, Andrew Lunetta. Andrew is the Executive Director of A Tiny Home for Good. That was when the idea came into Betsy's mind to suggest that A Tiny Home for Good might be able to use the second floor of St. Paul's Parish House to build apartments for people who have experienced homelessness. Ever since that day, leaders at St. Paul's and A Tiny Home for Good have been working together to make this dream a reality.

The dream is powerful for A Tiny Home for Good because the men and women who live in Tiny Home stand-alone houses are getting older each year, just like you and me. Some of them will need to move into a low-income residence for seniors, with a social worker to provide them with support. A Tiny Home for Good plans to build ten accessible single-occupancy apartments with a community kitchen and an office for their support staff on the second floor of St. Paul's Parish House.

The dream is powerful for St. Paul's because you and I, in our best moments, are trying to follow the instructions given to us by Jesus. Jesus asks his disciples a question: If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. Jesus tells us to give our assistance to people who cannot pay us back. Jesus tells us when we care for those who are poor and hungry we are showing our love for God. Jesus tells us when we welcome the stranger, we are welcoming God into our lives. The dream is powerful for St. Paul's because this kind of partnership is Jesus' vision for us.

This partnership is the kind of new creation described near the end of the book of Isaiah. For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating; for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight.

Near the end of the passage we hear a description of peace and harmony among the creatures of God: The wolf and the lamb shall feed together.

God's new creation is a work of harmony among God's people. This is what is happening in our partnership with A Tiny Home for Good. God is bringing people together in ways they never expected. God is bringing together the people of St. Paul's and A Tiny Home for Good.

On Friday, six dozen people from St. Paul's and A Tiny Home for Good celebrated Thanksgiving together, here at St. Paul's. We experienced a different kind of joy and fellowship; it was the joy of cooking and working together with new partners; it was the joy of unexpected friendships; it was the joy of seeing a few of the barriers that separate people crumble before our eyes.

Each one of us can play a part in this dream, but the dream is much bigger than us; it is God's new creation. This is the kind of work that comes from God. St. Paul's is giving the second floor of the Parish House to A Tiny Home for Good for them to rebuild and use for the next 25 years. This is not the kind of idea that comes from the priest. The leaders of Open Doors, including me, were not looking for an answer to the question that included St. Paul's giving this space away for 25 years.

The partnership between St. Paul's and A Tiny Home for Good is a Jesus-kind-of-idea. Jesus is the one who gave up everything for our sake. This partnership is God's new creation, taking shape around us. It is God's new creation, taking shape through our efforts, if we let God work through us.

We are sometimes confused and discouraged because we see lots of bad things happening in the world. We see many people suffering. Sometimes we are suffering. It can be difficult to see the way God is working in the world. The partnership between St. Paul's and A Tiny Home for Good is one way we see God working in the world.

We have the opportunity to work as partners with God when we admit we don't have all of the answers to the big questions in our lives. Our partnership with A Tiny Home for Good began only after we had spent four years admitting to ourselves and others that we didn't have an answer to a big question. Today we are able to play a small part in God's new creation because seven years ago the leaders of Open Doors were able to admit our failure to answer the big question about the second floor.

This is the way it works in your life and in my life. We have to leave space for God to create something new in our lives. If we think we have all the answers to every question, then there will be no space for God to work in our lives. God's new creation requires us to trust the people around us, and to trust God, that there will be answers for the unresolved questions in our lives. It's not easy for us to trust each other and to trust God. Trust doesn't just happen. It gets built over months and years. Trust is a relationship that gets built or damaged depending on our actions.

God's new creation also requires us to listen. We have to listen to one another, and we need to find ways to listen to God speaking to us. It's not easy for us to listen to each other and to listen to God. We have to practice. When it comes to listening for God's voice in our lives, we have to pay attention to times and places when God speaks to us.

Listening for what God is saying is different for every person. For me, if I want to hear what God is saying in my life, it helps if I go outside and let myself be surrounded by God's creation. Sometimes I hear what God is saying when I am playing the piano or the organ. Sometimes I hear God's voice in worship. Sometimes I hear God's voice in the words of people around me.

I don't know many things about God, but I have noticed that God is very persistent. God speaks in a way that is quiet, so I have to quiet the busyness in myself in order to hear. Most of the time I don't hear actual words, but ideas and images and understandings come to me that were not in my mind before.

What are the big questions you have failed to answer in your life? These unresolved questions might be places where God creates something new. What are the places in your life where there is stillness and quietness, where you can listen for what God is saying? This might be the place where you hear the voice of the one who created you out of love and for the purposes of love.