Aug 31/Sept 1/2019 Green Eggs and Ham Rev. Amy Haines

Is 43:18-21, Acts 10:9-16 The Gospel According to Dr. Seuss

How many of you would confess to being a picky eater at some point in your life? How many of you didn’t want to eat beef? How many of you still don’t like turkey? How many of you refuse to eat anything green?

Nathan learned to finally eat hamburger when he began to do church-lunch-fellowship here as a 6th grader. Yet none of my kids will eat turkey or pork. My sister Jen still doesn’t like to eat much of anything green, whether that is green vegetables or green lettuce. She used to have to sit at Grandma’s table forever because she refused to eat even two peas or two green beans.

After I returned from Japan as a teenager, I refused to eat processed fish sticks for years. I was spoiled by the fresh fish overseas. I don’t eat much cereal anymore, for that was one of my aversions when pregnant with all of my kids.

I honestly think we all go through stages of what we will and will not eat.

Think of that toddler refusing to try a new flavor of baby food. Think of kids who will only eat Kraft macaroni and cheese. No other mac and cheese will do. Think of school children who pack peanut butter and jelly sandwiches every single day for lunch. Over the years I’ve encountered several high school and college students who go through a season of being vegan. I’ve known adults who refuse to eat anywhere that doesn’t have a chicken sandwich or hamburger. Don’t ever try to get them to a Chinese buffet or a Mexican restaurant. They hate spices.

If you’ve ever refused to try a new food, or encountered someone else who has a very limited menu, or struggled to get a child to take a bite of something new, then you can relate to today’s story from Dr. Seuss, “Green Eggs and Ham.”

Today we conclude our series *The Gospel According to Dr. Seuss* with this best-selling story in which Sam-I-am’s mission is to persistently persuade his unnamed friend to try green eggs and ham.

Three weeks ago we pondered the Dr. Seuss book “Oh The Places You’ll Go” and remembered that wherever we go on the journey of life and faith, God goes with us.

Two weeks ago we reflected on Dr. Seuss’ short story, “The Sneetches” that reminded us to cherish what we have in common instead of letting our differences divide us.

Last week we heard in the book “Horton Hears a Who”: “A person’s a person, no matter how small” reminding us that all lives matter.

Today’s sermon is based on Theodor Seuss Geisel’s most popular story, “Green Eggs and Ham.”

Did you know that this story was originally written in response to a bet? The CEO of Random House, Bennett Cerf, bet Geisel $50 that he couldn’t write a book using only 50 words. Not only does Green Eggs and Ham use only 50 words, only one of those words is more than one syllable! No wonder this has been a favorite story for teachers and parents since its publication in 1960!

--Lisa Degrenia “Green Eggs and Ham” 1-27-19 itrinity.org

Sometimes, less is more.

Last week we sang *Jesus Loves Me* as one of our Sunday hymns. Theologian Karl Barth, during one of his lecture tours in 1962, was asked to summarize his whole life’s work in theology in one sentence. Barth allegedly said something like “Yes, I can. In the words of a song I learned at my mother’s knee: ‘Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.”

-Roger Olson 1-24-13 patheos.com/blogs/rogereolson/2013/01/

did-karl-barth-really-say-jesus-loves-me-this-i-know

Sam-I-am has a singular mission: continue to invite his unnamed friend to try green eggs and ham. He offers the invitation in a variety of ways.

Do you like green eggs and ham?

Would you like them here or there?

Would you like them in a house?

Would you like them with a mouse?

Would you eat them in a box?

Would you eat them with a fox?

Would you? Could you?

In a car?

Eat them! Eat them!

Here they are.

You may like them.

You will see.

You may like them in a tree!

Could you, would you, on a train?

Would you, could you, in the dark?

Would you, could you, in the rain?

Could you, would you, with a goat?

Would you, could you, on a boat?

-Dr. Seuss “Green Eggs and Ham” Random House 1960

Sam-I-am is focused on his mission. He believes wholeheartedly in what he is offering. Sam is also creative in the many ways he offers his green eggs and ham. He really, really, really wants his friend to try them.I love how another pastor describes Sam as “joyfully persistent.” (Lisa Degrenia) He is cheerful, determined and refuses to take NO as an answer.

Have you ever been so excited about something that you told everyone you met about it, family, friend, even a stranger? Maybe you shared about a new restaurant with an incredible menu. Or a song that brought you to tears. Maybe you had to share your love of the latest movie. Or your amazement at an incredible football play. Maybe you shared the latest antics by your child. Or how the kindness of another warmed your heart.

When was the last time you energetically shared with someone else the story of what God is doing in your life? When was the last time you told another about how your faith in Jesus makes a difference in your life? When was the last time you were lovingly persistent in inviting someone else to taste and see our Jesus, to use the words of Psalm 34:8: “Taste and see that the Lord is Good”?

Sadly, in our culture today we are more apt to share our love of a new restaurant or our amazement at Springboro’s kicker making a 47-yard field goal or our reflections on Hurricane Dorian than we are to share our love for Jesus or offer an invitation to join us for worship or invite someone else to trust God’s faithfulness.

Sam-I-am was joyfully persistent in his invitation to taste green eggs and ham.

We can see this same persistence in the overall arch of our Scriptures. Over and over and over again God reminds God’s people that they are valued and loved. Time and time and time again God invites God’s people into a new relationship with God, a relationship grounded in grace.

Story after story after story the Bible introduces us to a God of surprises, a God of new beginnings, a God of hope for the future.

Today we hear this persistent invitation to follow God in a new way through both the prophet Isaiah as well as the apostle Peter.

Peter was in the port city of Joppa, visiting disciples of Jesus who now resided there. One day, while waiting for lunch to be prepared by his hosts, Peter went up to the roof to pray. While there, he had a vision. A sheet was lowered from heaven in front of Peter, and on it were all kinds of four-legged animals, reptiles and wild birds, all animals forbidden by the Law for faithful Jews to eat.

Yet Peter heard a voice tell him,

“Get up, Peter! Kill and eat!”

To which Peter passionately replied,

“Absolutely not, Lord! I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.”

This vision happened not once, but three times, until Peter began to get the message that God was about to do a new thing, making pure what once was considered unclean. This vision was God’s way to persistently invite Peter to be open to the expansion of the Gospel beyond the Jews.

And immediately following this vision, messengers appeared from Caesarea, inviting Peter to come and share the good news of Jesus to Cornelius and his household, a Gentile, a Roman soldier, yet a God-fearing righteous man. Without the vision, Peter may have refused to go to the Gentiles. Yet Peter listened, and obeyed, and trusted God to guide him as he journeyed next to Caesarea.

The prophet Isaiah had the daunting task of sharing God’s word with the people of Israel in exile in Babylon. The temple and city of Jerusalem were destroyed. They were hundreds of miles away from home, with no hope of being released. Many now believed God had abandoned them, instead of recognizing the exile was their punishment for turning away from God.

In the midst of that context, Isaiah began to offer a persistent invitation to return to the Lord, to live by trust, faith and hope, for God had not forgotten them and God would eventually make a way for them to return home.

In today’s passage Isaiah shares that God declares,

“Look! I’m doing a new thing;  
     now it sprouts up; don’t you recognize it?” (v19)

God will make a way home in the wilderness. God will create rivers in the desert. God will continue to claim God’s people.

Sadly, many of the Israelites were not ready to see God doing a new thing. They believed that God had given up on them, so they had given up on God.

Sadly, how often can we not see when God is moving in a new way in and through and around us? How often do we confess to God,

No we don’t see how you are guiding us through the power of the Holy Spirit;

No we don’t see the value of following Jesus wherever he leads us;

No we don’t see God still working in our world;

No we don’t perceive a new way forward in mission and ministry and faith and faithfulness.

Sometimes we say no to God because we cannot fathom God’s new ways, and sometimes we say no to God because we don’t want to see. For if we see God’s new thing, and are to follow God’s new way, then we must change. Many times we don’t want to change, so we resist God’s invitation. Then we use phrases such as “we’ve never done it that way before” or “we’ve always done it that way” as excuses to shut down anything new.

I believe that is why God spoke through the prophet Isaiah beginning with these words:

“Do not remember the former things,  
     or consider the things of old.” (v18)

While we are to remember all that God has done, and remember the power of God’s grace, we are not to remain stuck in the past. Isaiah calls us to let go of our old ways of thinking, to move out of our comfort zones, to follow the Spirit into an unpredictable future. Hard to do, yet that is God’s call to God’s people time and again throughout the Scriptures, including to us here today. God declares:

Trust me. Follow me. I am doing and will do a new thing, that is grace-filled and life-giving.

Our human nature, however, is inclined to always say no first to something new—a new food, a new journey, a new relationship, a new way of being church. Often we will continue to say no unless we know more, until our curiosity gets the better of us, until we are tired of persistent invitations, or unless something begins to stir within us.

Sam’s friend was adamant he was never going to try green eggs and ham.

It didn’t matter who with or where:

Not on a train! Not in a tree!

Not in a car! Sam! Let me be!

I would not, could not, in a box.

I could not, would not, with a fox.

I will not eat them with a mouse.

I will not ear them in a house.

I will not eat them here or there.

I will not eat them anywhere.

I do not like green eggs and ham.

I do not like them, Sam-I-am.

I imagine NO was Peter’s first response to the vision to kill and eat those animals considered unclean. No way, God, am I going to make myself unclean.

I imagine NO was the exiles’ first response to the prophet Isaiah’s vision of a new thing. No way, Isaiah, does God still care for us.

I imagine NO was Theodor Geisel’s first response when publisher and publisher turned down his first book, “And To Think That I Saw It On Mulberry Street.” No, I will not go away, for this is a good book.

How often is NO our first response when someone wants to offer a new ministry in the church, or when I want to change up the hymns or songs or order of worship, or when you are invited to be a part of some specific committee or team or ministry in the church. No, don’t move me out of my comfort zone.

We often will say no—unless the one offering the invitation is joyfully persistent. Then there is something that compels us to try whatever is new.

I’ve seen men and women come alive when they find a new way to serve that combines their skills and passions ,or when they find a new way to serve in which they see an impact in another’s faith journey.

I’ve seen churches renew themselves by taking on a new ministry opportunity, a new outreach to their community in which they get to know their neighbors.

How many of us have surprised ourselves when we’ve tried a new food—and liked it. How many of us have surprised ourselves when we’ve reached out to a newcomer—and found a good friend.How many of us have surprised ourselves when we’ve reluctantly said yes to God’s new path forward for us—and along the way have been blessed beyond measure.

Sam-I-am was joyfully persistent and passionately determined. And finally his friend gave in,

I suspect just to shut Sam up and make him go away.

This is where I wish I had the illustrations from the story to share with you on the big screen. Yet I wasn’t sure of copyright concerns.

As you visual the story, keep in mind Sam-I-am has been persistent in asking if his friend would eat them in a house, in a box, in a car, in a tree, on a train, and on a boat. Well, the car landed on the train, and the train landed on the boat. And the boat sank. So now everyone, human and animal alike, are in the water.

And still, Sam is persistent.

You do not like them.

So you say.

Try them! Try them!

And you may. Try them and you may, I say.

And the friend responds,

Sam!

If you will let me be,

I will try them.

You will see.

You know what comes next--

He actually liked them!

Say!

I like green eggs and ham!

I do! I like them, Sam-I-am!

And I would eat them in a boat.

And I would eat them with a goat…

And I will eat them in the rain.

And in the dark. And on a train.,

And in a car. And in a tree.

They are so good, so good you see!

So I will eat them in a box.

And I will eat them with a fox.

And I will eat them in a house.

And I will eat them with a mouse.

And I will eat them here and there.

Say! I will eat them ANYWHERE!

When have we been surprised by something new?

A new food that looks strange yet tastes incredible

A new opportunity for work

A new ministry or way to serve for Jesus in the community or church

A new way of being in relationship with God, full of grace and love rather than judgment and fear

I have no doubt Israel was surprised when God actually made a way home through the desert wilderness, via the generosity of the Persian King Cyrus.

I have no doubt the disciples were surprised every time Jesus healed and fed 5000 and offered new life to outcasts.

I have no doubt Peter was surprised when God’s Spirit moved through the Gentile household of Cornelius.

I have no doubt God has surprised many of us throughout our faith journeys and we each have a story to share.

And I have no doubt God still wants to surprise us, here and now, calling us to new ministries, new relationships, new opportunities to invite others to come and taste and see our Jesus.

Are we willing to listen to God? Are we willing to be surprised by God? Are we willing to be led by God into something new? Are we willing to be lovingly persistent in sharing the invitation to taste and see our Jesus?

The final page in Dr. Seuss’ story has the friend proclaiming:

I do so like green eggs and ham!

Thank you! Thank you, Sam-I-am!

How many of us are here today because someone else was lovingly persistent to us with the gospel message? How many of us could name who we need to thank for being an example of love and grace to us?

“Green Eggs and Ham” reminds us to be open to God’s persistent new paths on the journey of faith, and reminds us to offer loving invitations of faith to others.

May our faith be contagious, and our passion for Jesus be seen in our words, our worship and our ways of being.

Three weeks ago I closed with words from Rev. Jennifer Gingras.

Today, I want to bring us back to those words,

as we conclude our series *The Gospel According to Dr. Seuss*:

Congratulations! Today is our day!

We are disciples, Those who follow ‘The Way’.

We have God as our guide. We have the Bible in hand.

Our job is to spread, God’s love in the land.

When God calls, Don’t worry. Don’t fuss.

Just listen to the Spirit. God be with us.

So… No matter our talent or the size of our gift

We can help others and God’s name we lift

We are disciples. Today is our day.

To enact God’s love in a Christ-like way.

So…let’s get on with it, whatdy’a say?

--excerpted from a sermon “Oh, The Places You’ll Go! (As Disciples)”

for Holy Humor Sunday, 4-12-15, Rev. Jennifer Gingras mcc-ucc.org

May we live as Jesus’ disciples, lovingly persistent, recognizing that all lives matter, focusing on what draws us together, wherever we go in Jesus’ name.

May it be so. Let us pray.