

"Q & A." A Catechism for a New Year.

Happy New Year!

In Isaiah, God makes the following promise; *"I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness ... [for] my chosen people, the people whom I formed for myself so that they might declare my praise."* (Isaiah 43:19-20 NRSV)

This is both a fitting passage for the beginning of a New Year, and a way to introduce the new preaching 'series' that we started this month. In this promise, God offers us the hope that the *"former things – the things of old"* are behind us and that He will give us a way forward and provide all that we will need – not only to survive, but to in turn, respond to God with praise! This is a wonderful promise filled with hope, purpose, and instruction, and it is also a wonderful way to describe what I have been working on for several months.



Eight months ago, I came upon a resource called *The New City Catechism* produced by Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City. When I read it, I began to think about how we could use this material to learn about – and reinforce our understanding of – who we are as children of God, and how we could enrich our relationship and worship of God. For those older than I am, catechisms were a beloved or hated part of Church life, worship, education as they were used to teach and educate members in the tenants of the faith. But, today, they are seldom used, to the Church's detriment. The authors of the *New City Catechism* say they *"believe the Church needs this ancient practice more than ever to equip Christ's people to stand fast in the face of an ever-changing"* world; and I do too.

"Catechisms" (Greek: *"katechein"*, meaning *"to teach or instruct orally, by word of mouth"*), and their use, have a long history in the Church: by using a question and answer format catechisms served to build up and establish the Church by introducing – and teaching – theology and doctrine simply and uniformly. This was the case during the Reformation when Reformers such as Martin Luther and John Calvin wrote catechisms to build up Bible literacy and to combat doctrinal confusion in their growing churches. It is from this tradition that the *New City Catechism* comes as an updated combination of three of the major teaching documents of the Reformation: the Geneva Catechism, the Westminster Shorter and Longer catechisms, and the Heidelberg Catechism. (For more on the *New City Catechism* and for the web/phone app of the catechism I encourage you to go to <http://newcitycatechism.com/>)

Divided into three sections, the *New City Catechism* focuses on (Part 1) God, creation and fall, and the Law; (Part 2) Christ, redemption, and grace; and (Part 3) the Holy Spirit, restoration, and growing in grace: perfect for teaching – and preaching! For Epiphany we will focus on Part 1, Lent will cover Part 2, and Eastertide and Pentecost will deal with Part 3. I am excited about this opportunity for us to dig deep into the tenets of our faith, and I am looking forward to exploring what it means to live them out in our lives faithfully. I believe God will bless us – and St. Andrew's – as we remind ourselves of what it means to truly worship, serve, and praise God in and through Jesus Christ. And there's no better time than Epiphany – the time of new beginnings, new things, and the light of God's Word – to do this. I look forward to seeing you at Church!

