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Date: January 1, 2012
Sermon Title: 3-D glasses
Scripture: Isaiah 43:18-21
Pastor: Rev. Alida Ward

David and I love going to movies, as you can tell by the number of movie quotes the two of us work into our sermons over the course of a given year. In fact, whenever we see a really good movie, we then have to enter into negotiations over who gets to use it in a sermon. “No, no, no way, you don’t get to quote *The Help*, you already took *Midnight in Paris*, remember?” So, loving movies as we do, a few weeks back we went to see one which, to be honest, neither of us is going to be able to use in a sermon, because not too many people over the age of, say, *twelve* went to see it.

We went to see *Puss in Boots*, the animated spin-off from the *Shrek* franchise. It has the voice of Antonio Banderas as Puss, who, I don’t why, just cracks both of us up. And, *and*, best of all -- it was in 3-D. And I, at the ripe of old age of well, at my ripe old age, I had never seen a 3-D movie. I was so excited. I went up to the cashier to get our tickets. Two adults, she said, and I’m sorry, how many kids did you say? Um, just us, actually, I said. Two adults to see *Puss in Boots*, she said. *Is that weird?* I said. *Oh, no*, she said, *I’m sure lots of other adults without kids will be coming to see it. By themselves. Yup.* She handed me the 3-D glasses. I put them on right away. *I have never seen a 3-D movie*, I said, *and I am so excited!* I had a feeling that at that point, I had in fact crossed the thin line into weird.

David and I went in and sat in the middle of the theater. We were surrounded by nine year olds and their parents. We put those glasses on and we were entranced. I shrieked as animated creatures flew through the air at us, we ducked back in our seats as horses galloped at us, gasped “how do they DO that?” Honestly, you would have been embarrassed for us, but we were as excited by our 3-D glasses as anyone has been since they were invented, what, fifty years ago?

It actually reminded me of the first day **I** wore glasses, *real* glasses. Second grade. My teacher had finally deduced that I had a problem seeing, the day that I moved my school desk all the way up to the blackboard to see

what she was writing. Soon after that I was outfitted with my first spectacles. I still remember getting out of the car at home, and looking up at the tree in our front yard, and for the first time seeing leaves on the tree. I had had no idea that you were supposed to be able to see the leaves – all I had ever seen was a blur of green that I thought was what everyone saw.

It's not like the leaves hadn't been there all along. They just hadn't been there for me. I suddenly saw what I couldn't see before, just like putting those 3-D glasses on my nose in the movie theater meant the difference between some fuzzy animated cat running around a flat screen or that same animated cat jumping out at you. It all came down to the lens you'd been given to look through. They didn't change reality, but they changed reality for you.

I was thinking about that for today, for this morning, for this new year's day. The truth is, of course, that there is nothing really *new* about the world today. The world is not different this morning than it was yesterday morning. Reality has not changed. There *is* nothing new about life on this new year's day, in truth. And yet, at midnight, watching the ball drop in Times Square with Dick Clark, God bless him, and listening to the fireworks going off somewhere outside, I felt that same wonderful thrill of excitement that you could see on every Times Square partygoer's face. All of us thinking – something new could be coming. Something really might be new this time.

Maybe the world *isn't* different today. But what *can* be new, what can be brand new, is the lens we look at it through. There were leaves on the tree at my childhood home before I got my glasses, but they were brand new to me when I put those glasses in front of my eyes. So, in fact, the world can be new this morning, this year. We can see it brand new.

I think that's why there are so many places in the Bible where God says *look, see, I am making all things new for you, look, I am doing something new.* In that passage Jim read to us from Isaiah: *Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? Do you not perceive it?* What God was saying, what God is saying is this, you can make this world of yours, this life of yours, brand new. With my help. What I offer you is a way to *look* at my world, to see, perceive, the way I see. Look through the lens that I am holding out to you and see this world, your world, your life, everything, in a new way. See it with faith, look at it with hope, perceive what I perceive: infinite possibility, creation still unfolding.

So the world may be the same as it was yesterday, our lives may be the same as they were yesterday, our struggles and needs and hurts may be the same, but, *but*, what God hands us is these [3-D glasses] – a new way to see it. *Behold, I making all things new. I am doing a new thing – do you not perceive?*

Two weeks ago, at our high school youth group, I turned the evening over to an old friend of mine, Dan Braccio. Dan is the director of the Co-op Center in Bridgeport, a ministry to ex-offenders rebuilding their lives after incarceration. He came with three guests, three young men, one of whom had been released this year from prison. The challenge they put before our high school teens was to guess which one of them was the one who'd been incarcerated. The three sat before us just like the old game show 'To Tell The Truth', and let the SPF kids pepper them with questions. When asked to choose which contestant, as it were, was the one who'd gone to prison, few of them chose the gentle boy sitting in the middle.

But he was the one. Mike, I'll call him. And Mike shared his story, of drugs and crime and finally a stolen car, of life in prison and the fear and loneliness. But he's out. Now I'm back, he said, and in some ways nothing's changed. I still live in the same place, I still live with the same people around me trying to get me to do the same bad things. But I see them different now, he said. I know what doesn't belong in my life. Now I focus on other things. And I can see what I can be, and that's different now too. That's why I'm back at school. I see things different now, Mike said. There was nothing changed about the world Mike came back to after prison. But with my friend Dan's help, and with God's help, Mike had different lenses to see it through.

Behold, I can make all things new, God says, behold, I am doing something new – do you not perceive it? Mike *did* perceive it – saw not just what was, but what could be – saw clearly, through God's eyes, what a new life would look like. That was his new year's day.

Over Christmas weekend, CNN aired one of my favorite shows of the year, their annual "Heroes" special – honoring ten people, ten ordinary people who are chosen for their extraordinary compassion. Each year, the show moves and inspires me. This year, I was particularly touched by one woman's story, Amy Stokes. In 2003, Amy and her husband traveled to South Africa to adopt their son, Calder. They brought him home, but Amy couldn't stop thinking about all the other children they had seen in South Africa, growing up without parents, orphaned by AIDS. Amy wanted somehow to give them parents, too. So she created something called Infinite Family, a pretty marvelous concept. Kids in South Africa come to a community center, where there are computers, computers with web cams. And they sit down and smile into the camera, and smiling right back at them through the computer is a friendly, loving face, right here in *this* country – a mentor, a mom, a granddad, someone who has signed on to be family for a little kid on another continent. *Infinite family*, kids, and people who love them, connected across the miles, talking together every week, or more, listening, encouraging, loving.

And it has been extraordinary what has happened with these kids. Kids have thrived with this attention, found hope, achieved. "This is my chance

again to have a family,” one boy said, who talks each week with Betty and Dave in Sycamore, Pennsylvania.

What Amy Stokes saw when she went to South Africa was the same desperate tragedy that many have seen, orphaned children beyond count. But when one of those children became her own, it was as if God handed her new lenses with which to see what was before her. She saw herself suddenly as mother not just to one child, but to thousands; she saw *each* child as her own to care for; she saw an infinite family, which is what God sees. With God’s eyes, Amy saw clearly what her place in this world was, and she saw something new and miraculous that could be. That was her new year’s day. Not that the world in front of her had changed overnight, but what she saw in that world, in her world, was something brand new.

What God gives to us on this new year’s day is the chance to make our lives new, make our world new, by seeing them anew. By looking with God’s eyes, through God’s lenses, God’s 3-D glasses. By seeing what with faith is possible, doors swinging open, hearts opening too. By looking with the eyes of compassion, looking through the lens of hope. By seeing what can be, by seeing light and not shadows, by seeing goodness and grace and possibility. This becomes our new year’s day by the way we choose to *see* all that lies ahead.

In just a few moments, we will share a meal, a simple meal of bread and cup which Christians have shared for centuries together. And what we remember when we share this meal is what Jesus said to his friends as *they* shared this meal. “I want you to see something new,” he said, “Whenever you share a loaf of bread together, whenever you share a meal, I want you to see me there. I want you to see the meal you share as my very self, given for you, as my very presence, feeding you with strength.” And if you see this, Jesus said, then you will *always* see me.

May the faith that we share in his name, and the hope that God gives us each morning bless our eyes with the vision to see all things made new this new year’s day and forever. Amen.