

“Sing a New Song”
Pastor Terry Hanna

“O sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things.”-Psalm 98

If I had my school years to do over again, I would have studied more history. History not only teaches us about our past, but also informs our present. It helps us to see our story as part of a larger story and to glimpse our future through a wider lens. It gives us perspective.

Historian Phyllis Tickle writes that every five hundred years or so our culture goes through an era of enormous upheaval, a morphing or shift, in which everything changes. Everything changes, from politics to economics, from technology to social structures, from intellectual pursuits to domestic systems. Everything changes, including religion!*

Now, I am not saying that God changes, *“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.”* (Hebrews 13: 8 NIV) The essence of God is always the same and that essence is love. But the way we worship and the way we witness will change in a changing culture.

Bishop Mark Dyer of the Episcopal church refers to this time as “another one of our five hundred years rummage sales,” where we throw out the old and embrace the new. That is why this new era is called the Great Emergence. The church will have to let go of some old ways of being to embrace new ways of speaking in the language of the culture in which it exists, so that the message that “Jesus Christ is Lord!” can be heard.

Why are we so afraid of change? Is it because we don't really trust that God is in control of history? Christianity will not die! It is like a mighty river that just gained a whole new tributary that will spread into new lands and wash over whole new bodies of people.

Last week, I found myself worshiping in the chapel of Duke Divinity School. I was sitting next to my colleague and friend in ministry Wayne Dickert. On each side of us sat our summer interns, one Methodist and one Presbyterian, coming to Bryson City to do their field placements. Our worship included old liturgy and new poetry. And as I looked around me I saw ministers who had been in ministry over thirty years and young students who had never served a church. I saw people dressed in dresses, suits and ties, and others dressed in jeans and t-shirts. The old pipe organ in the balcony sat silent as we sang a new song with guitar and drum. Instead of hymnals we read words off a large screen that hung from the chapel's old wood beams.

It looked like Pentecost. It sounded like Pentecost. The song was unfamiliar, out of my comfort zone, but as I listened, the music filled the air, swirled around us, and lifted up and out into the world. It reminded me that faith is just one big adventure and the history of our faith shows new growth and change in every era. We must be open to shaping our Christian message in new ways in order to communicate the Good News in a changing world. I am ready to sing a new song and try new things to reach a new culture. I am not afraid. So come join me as *“we sing to the Lord a new song.”*

Pastor Terry

*Phyllis Tickle, in [The Presbyterian Outlook](#), May 11, 2015