Behold, I am about to do a new thing! Reconnect Sunday, a time to gather together at the end of the summer. Kids and teachers are back in school. Fresh beginnings. New things. And it’s not only the schools that are starting new semesters. Some of us are even in what seems to be a kind of new semester of our lives. There are fresh starts, new opportunities, novel challenges that stretch us and we grow in new and exciting ways.

However, some others may not be feeling so fresh and new. It’s hard to see a new thing happening as one learns she has to undergo yet another round of chemotherapy. It’s hard to see a new thing happening as he watches his business falter. It’s hard to see a new thing happening as an Israelite wandering in the wilderness -- tired and thirsty. Words such as, “Don’t worry, everything will be OK,” may seem empty hearted in a time of crisis. In times of despair, it can be downright impossible to see any light at the end of the tunnel. For many, this is precisely the time we may feel abandoned by God. We may say to ourselves, “If God really loved me, this would not be happening.” But, let me assure you, my friends, even when things look their absolute worst, God is there. Although God didn’t create the crisis, God is there bringing about a new thing.

The prophet Isaiah reminds the Israelites and us today that God delivered God’s people from the Egyptians, making a way through the Red Sea, demolishing the army behind them. When things look their absolute worst, God is there to make a way in the wilderness, to provide rivers in the desert, to give drink to God’s people. Yes, God will be there for us in our wilderness times, in our dry times, in our times of doubt, in our times of crisis. You know, the yesterdays Isaiah talks about are not simply object lessons but our foundation as we look forward eagerly to what God is doing in our lives right now and what God will be doing tomorrow. Yes, we have a faith that is not stuck in the past. Our faith is a faith of the future, where we can expect to find God. So let me pause a moment and ask you -- Do you expect to find God ... in your life today? In your life tomorrow?

As I have studied the Bible through the years, it has occurred to me that the Bible could almost be renamed ... a new title, “Great Expectations”. Because, from beginning to end, the Bible is the story of human hope founded in God; full of expectation, full of promise, full of joy. Our Scripture reading this morning certainly speaks of expectations of promise and anticipation of what might be. And so, this morning, I invite you to join Isaiah in great expectations.

As far as I’m concerned, one of the worst things that can happen to us is to begin to believe that what we have, and what we are, and what we know right now is the whole story. Well, I want to say to you that, for you, there is more. There is more for your life. There is more for your faith. My friends, if I believed that they way I know God today is all I would ever know of God, I would be very disappointed. If I were to believe that my relationship with Jesus Christ was complete, it would be sad. But I say to you that we will know God more fully and we will experience Jesus Christ more powerfully. for God is doing a new thing in each one of us. If your prayer life is non-existent or flat, expect it to get better. God is about to do a new thing in you. If your knowledge of God and your relationship with Jesus Christ is not filled with promise and if it does not empower you with confidence, expect it to improve. God is about to do a new thing in you. If your witness and service and hope are stumbling, expect to stand tall again. Because
God, our creator, is not finished forming you ... it is not over. God is about to do a new thing. My friends, lean into the future. Live in confidence. Live in faith. Live in expectation.

An old man looks out from prison bars. This is a view he’s seen before. He’s been arrested so many times. Funny how life turns out. He was once a man of prominence; well educated, well respected. He had the right name, the right job, the right social connections. But he lost it all. How do these things happen? He had been somebody. Now he was nobody. And all because of one decision he would never second guess. The old man sits down and grasps a pen in his arthritic fingers. Who knows how much time he’s got left to tell his story? For all he knows, this could be his last letter. Powerful people want him dead. But, strangely, the old man is not afraid. He squints down at his paper and begins to write a letter to his friends in Philippi. The Apostle Paul writes ... If anyone else has reason to be confident, I have more; a member of the people of Israel, a Hebrew born of Hebrews: as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness, blameless. Yet, whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord! I want to know Christ, and the power of his resurrection. Not that I have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Beloved, this one thing I do; forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

These words were written by the Apostle Paul to the Philippian church. He writes that although he knows the power of Christ, he has not reached his goal. He keeps pressing on, straining forward to what lies ahead. And isn’t there a sense of expectation of Christ’s glory in his words. Yes, even as Paul sat in jail, he had confidence that Christ had made him his own. He knew the love of Christ and he had great expectations of his growing relationship with Christ Jesus.

But, we, like Paul, know it can take time to see what new thing God is working in our lives. We also know that change can be tremendously difficult. It is so often hard to embrace something new, especially if you were not looking for something new in the first place. It can be hard to accept something unexpected and unplanned. What a shock to learn you need surgery. How disillusioning to see the business you worked so hard to create, fall apart before your very eyes. Forty years is a long time to wander in the wilderness. Change can shake our very foundation, even the foundation of our faith. But the word we receive from Paul is ... press on ... press on. You have been chosen as Christ’s own. Expect to know Christ Jesus more fully, more powerfully.

Maybe there are some folks here this morning that are struggling with their own life, their own faith; wrestling with doubt and questions. Am I speaking to you this morning? Well, if you are unsure of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus ... If you are unsure that God’s is really on your side with you in each step of your life. Well then, here is what I suggest, no, here is what I strongly recommend expect to find God. If you can’t find God, if right now you are struggling to know Christ, expect that you will. Live your life as though Christ is with you. Live your life as though God is on your side. Live your life looking ahead to the future with anticipation, confidence, and faith. And I can assure you that, as you press on toward the goal, you will find the promise and you will know the blessing. Yes, God is doing a new thing in your life. That’s what we call “Great expectations.” Great expectations!
I invite you also, not only to have individual expectations, not only to know promise for your own lives, but also for all of us as a church family. Have great expectations for this congregation. Join me as I hope and pray and trust that in the days ahead God will work through our congregation in mission and ministry, strengthening our lives, and expanding our fellowship. As we seek and serve Christ to make a difference, we will make a difference in our lives, our community, and, yet, even in our world. Yes, let’s all press on together, with great expectations for what lies ahead, as God does a new thing in our congregation.

In fact, today you have the opportunity to sign-up for a small group; just a single meeting for about an hour where we will take time to share the blessing of being part of this church family and where we have seen the Lord at work in our midst. Time to share our most cherished traditions and practices that will not change and our hopes and our dreams for the future of Bon Air Church. We will consider our own Great Expectations about how God is at work in and through our congregation and how God is moving us in amazing and powerful ways. I am pleased to report that, so far, almost forty people have made the commitment to help facilitate these groups. I urge you, each of you, to attend a meeting. Our first two meetings are on Sunday, September 22, during the youth activity which children are welcome to attend so there is child care for all you parents. Meetings will continue through October 9; after church, after Wednesday night dinner, in the daytime and in the evening. The sign-up board is currently in the office foyer, however you will see it in various locations. Not only that, but we will be e-mailing all you who have internet connections with the address for sign-up genius so you can sign-up online. My friends, every voice is important. Whether you are a long-time member or new to our community, you are welcome.

Share your great expectations. Live your great expectations. My friends, I invite you to press on, acting in faith with great expectation of what lies ahead as God does a new thing in your life, our church, our community, and our world.