

## GOD KNOWS

*None of us knows what the next change is going to be, what unexpected opportunity is just around the corner, waiting a few months or a few years to change all the tenor of our lives.* Kathleen Norris

I've begun thinking about my "Farewell Tour" to be launched sometime in the Fall. Tina Turner is my hero but I won't be following her lead- a Farewell Tour followed by, guess what, another Farewell Tour. I'm opting for the Trent Reznor (of Nine Inch Nails) model- this is it and we're giving away all our stuff. It worked out well for him; he just won an Oscar for best film score.

People have been asking me what my plans are and I have no idea (except they probably won't include winning an Oscar). All right, I have one idea and it doesn't include an encore performance. This may be all I know how to do, but it is time I learn something new. There is wisdom in experience. There is also tunnel vision.

God is doing a new thing, and I'm not just talking about me. The church is going through some changes; getting a make-over; organizing for a huge rummage sale... I don't know what it is, but I am sure it's not the same old thing. It could, however, be a very old thing.

In his book, *THE FUTURE OF FAITH*, Harvey Cox reminds us that during its first 300 years the "faith" that held Christian communities together was "...hope and assurance in the dawning of a new era of freedom, healing, and compassion that Jesus had demonstrated. To be a Christian meant to live in his spirit, embrace his hope, and to follow him

in the work he had begun.” It did not mean belief in a commonly held set of theological understandings about Jesus. Orthodoxy-correct belief- came later. And so did heresy. Sharing table fellowship with the poor and the outcast was more important than saying the correct words over the cup and the bread.

Cox suggests that the church is moving into a new era of old time religion. “...Christianity is growing faster than it ever has before, but mainly outside the West and in movements that accent spiritual experience, discipleship, and hope; pay scant attention to creeds; and flourish without hierarchies.” How will religion (which means “bond”) bind us to God and to each other in a church more eclectically diverse than we are able to imagine? How we will find our bearings when the church is no longer the western European institution we thought it was? And how will we know who “we” are when the labels Conservative, Liberal, Evangelical, and Pentecostal don’t tell us anything useful, if they ever did?

It is clearly fruit basket upset for the church. When the basket is righted, some of the familiar fruit will be missing, and some of the stuff in there will be unidentifiable, at least by most of us. It is a painful, anxious, exhilarating, hopeful time that may change all the tenor of our lives. We should remember what a friend of Julie Yarborough’s once said about his congregation, “We were so close to death we could smell resurrection.”

Breathe deeply. That fragrance is not just Spring.