

Sarah Kretzmann  
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*“Look, I am doing a new thing! Do you not perceive it?” (Isaiah 43.19)*

Usually when we speak about God doing new things, we speak of sweet things, of new relationships, of new babies, of new vocations, new homes, new opportunities. Usually God's new things are spoken of in comfortable, reassuring, sweet ways. And sometimes God's new things are indeed comfortable and reassuring and sweet.

But sometimes they are just downright odd. Or, to use the scientific terminology, sometimes God's new things are “weird” and “bizarre.”

I am, of course, speaking of the Hell Chicken. I learned about this ancient animal on IPR.

This beast actually goes by two names—the Hell Chicken or the Chicken from Hell.

Its name is appropriate on two different levels.

Firstly, this set of puzzling fossil bones was dug up in the Hell Creek Geological Formation in Montana. And secondly, if you took a chicken, crossed it with an ostrich, bulked it up to 500 pounds, stretched it out to roughly 11 feet, put a bony crest on its head (like some ancient Greek helmet), added a dinosaur tail and a pair of forelimbs with five-inch claws, and then, finally, stuck some feathers on it ... you would have what paleontologists are calling the Chicken from Hell, or the Hell Chicken.

Scientists all agree this bird is appropriately named for both reasons.

(Another humorous dimension to the story is that the bones of this weird bird are stored at the Smithsonian Museum in a drawer called the Sues Drawer...although it's not named after Dr. Suess, it sure should be, along with the Sneeches Drawer, which is right new to the Grinch Drawer.)

And so for the past decade, scientists have been scratching their heads, wondering what in the world this creature is, how it fits into the food chain and what in the world God was thinking when he created this atrocity, at least the Christian scientists are asking that (not to be confused with the Christian Science scientists, of course).

And so what in the world does the Hell Chicken have to do with Lent and with Isaiah and with you and me? Can these threads be tied together? Yes, they can be.

Well, clearly, God created something new when he created the Hell Chicken. He created an animal that didn't neatly fit into any single category. He created an animal that was reminiscent of a harmless farmyard animal yet one that could easily rip the head off its prey without even breaking a sweat. He created an animal that is odd and bizarre, beautiful and hideous, intriguing and disturbing...a kind of Frankenstein of the animal world. Pieces from this, bits from that...an animal that is awkward, mismatched, sometimes even difficult to look at. An unsettling creature, to be sure.

Am I still talking about the Hell Chicken, or am I now talking about you and me? Perhaps we have more in common with this beastly bird than we might be inclined to think...neither you nor I fit neatly into this category or that category. We are inconsistent. We are an odd assortment of traits and characteristics, fused together in one person. We are a virtual casserole of human emotions. We are meek and violent. We are kind and cruel. We are beautiful and ghastly. We are graceful and clumsy. We are predator and prey. Mismatched. Unsettling. Odd. Weird. Bizarre. To borrow the scientific terms.

Sometimes when God creates something new it is purely beautiful—a sunset, the ocean, a baby, a spring rain. These things reveal God's uncontested beautiful new things.

But sometimes God's new things are surprising, maybe even scary and odd and bizarre and weird. These odd and bizarre things might make us wonder what God was thinking the day he created that thing or that person, but these odd and bizarre new things also show us that God still cares enough about this world to be actively involved in it's ongoing creation. Sometimes the result is sheer, breathtaking beauty. Sometimes the result is a weird chicken. Sometimes the result is an odd person. But we are all here, we all have our place...the ugly one, the beautiful one, and even the surprising one.