

IN THE BEGINNING

Welcome to a brand new year. Last week we celebrated the birth of God's Son, our Savior that came to give us new beginnings. Today we celebrate the birth of a new year, which gives us in many ways a new beginning. On the very first Sunday of a new year we are always wondering what happened to last year and what will this new year be like, what will it bring? Some are looking forward to retiring, some graduations and others finding a job. This year we have a presidential election so our airways will be flooded with adds from politicians to 'chose me' to be our leaders. Years seem to fly by for many of us. But the young folks think at times they don't go fast enough. They are in a hurry just like when we were younger and couldn't wait to get older. Same dreams...same goals...same wanting it today... When you get older, well, we wonder where it all went. I don't think many make New Year's resolutions like they once did because they know it won't be long before they break them. And some were foolish, or so it seems. But there are some who will begin to work on areas of their lives that need work, like getting in shape, watching a diet and trying to eat more healthy. Watch TV for a few minutes and commercials will be about losing weight products and the equipment needed to get those wonderful abs. Many people are sincere in all of that, but after awhile some fall by the wayside and fall back into what they always were doing not able to resist temptation for a long time, while others will reap the benefit of their persistence. I hope some will reflect on their spiritual life this year and exercise their faith and read his word more regularly and make an effort to draw closer to God.

This morning our final hymn is called "This is a Day of New Beginnings." I picked this hymn because it truly is a day of new beginnings. At the stroke of midnight the old is gone and on January 1 the new began. It's that transitional time to begin afresh. This is a new time, a new day with new dreams and hopes with the

same God who “makes all things new.” Or as the third verse says, “Then let us, with the Spirit’s daring, step from the past and leave behind our disappointments, guilt’s, and grieving, seeking new paths, and sure to find.”

As I thought about January 1 being a new beginning I thought about the beginning of John’s Gospel where it says, *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning....The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”*

If we go to the very first book of the Bible, the book of Genesis, which is the ‘book of beginnings,’ we find this reading... *“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”* After the resurrection we read, *“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched- this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it and we proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and has appeared to us.”*

A time of new beginnings....God making all things new. In the Book of Revelation after the last battle Scripture talks about a new heaven and new earth with the beginning of eternal life where there will be more sin, nor illness, nor death anymore. Think about it. In the beginning of time God brought forth a new world and filled it with wonderful things until sin was born and destroyed it all. But that was not the end. Throughout time God continued to make things new, raising up his people who would trust him. Then one day God sent his son who came to dwell among us to bring us a newness of life for God was with us on this earth. And one day when the time is right, there will come a new heaven and earth, a new beginning, this time lasting for eternity.

The story of Nicodemus is a wonderful story because his conversation with Jesus led to a new beginning. Nicodemus struggled with being 'born again' but he was thinking natural birth. Jesus said, 'no' to that, but a Spiritual birth, a birth from above that would transform the hearts of all people. Jeremiah and Ezekiel tell of receiving 'new hearts,' hearts that are cleansed and ready to be transformed to follow God. The old sinful heart replaced by a new cleansed heart from God. Ezekiel talks about God raising up the dry bones by breathing new life into them, life that is cleansed and richly blessed.

In his Gospel John doesn't begin with the birth of Christ nor his baptism but the fact that a new beginning had come right from God the Father. He came as a light into a wilderness of darkness to light the pathway to a new beginning through the Word that became flesh and lives with us.

You know lots of people would like to have a new beginning, a do over kind of thing. Sometimes watching a baseball game or a football game you hear the announcer say that a pitcher who threw a pitch the batter hit out of the park to beat them wishes he had a chance to throw that pitch again. Or the batter wishes he had a do over for that pitch that was in his wheel house he just fowled it off instead of hitting it over the fence. On the football field with a wide open receiver the quarterback throws the pass just a little further because he was in a hurry and wishes he had that one to do over. As a golfer we who don't play very well have a thing called a 'mulligan' where if you make a bad golf shot you can have a do over and wipe away the first shot like it never happened. Those I play with generally as a rule, allow one per nine from the tee only.... Or maybe a few more.... Which I call the grace of God.

Wouldn't it be great if we could have do over's in life? I mean, you know, when you've made a bad decision to do something and it turned out bad, or chosen the wrong profession and you feel stuck for the rest of your life, or you made some wrong choices you knew were wrong but their made. But what is, is. You can make

changes if you want, but you can't have a do over in most things wiping the past total out of history. History records all the events and there is no do over's in history.

Adam and Eve might have wished for a do over in the garden when they picked and ate the fruit from the forbidden tree. When consulted by God they could have told him they didn't realize the damage it was going to cause and could he give them a new chance, a do over....since he was God why not erase the last couple of minutes and Eve's conversation with the slimy snake and allow Eve to make a different decision. But we know that could not have happened. There is no do over. They had to live with their decision and so do we. For sin entered and so did death and we have had to live this life making decisions that sometimes we wish we could do over. Some are wise....some very much unwise.

But the one great thing is this. God does give us a kind of limited do over. We call that repentance. We call that seeking forgiveness where he wipes the slate clean and says okay, you can start over again right here , right now. The problem is this.... you will have to still live with the results of those sins. Criminals are able to repent for what they did, but they also have to pay the price for their transgressions by doing time. You can't change those things. You can change the future, but you can't erase the past. Forgiveness means a clean slate but it doesn't wipe away the results of those actions like they never happened. God doesn't say he will erase our past, but he does say the mistakes or sins we have committed are forgiven when we repent and he will not hold them against us. Be reminded, repentance is turning from the direction we were once going away from God to a new direction toward God.

Jimmy Stewart's Christmas movie, "It's A Wonderful Life" reminds me of the results of a do over. If you remember he had a great life at the beginning of the movie but things began to go downhill and his reputation in his small town was gone. No one trusted him anymore. He lost just about everything. The long and the

short of it is this...he wished he had never been born. And his angel that God sent to help him granted his wish. And the next thing you know when he went back to his town, he found it all different. No one knew him. His wife had not married or had married someone who didn't treat her well. His mother was in sorrow for the brother he saved as a kid, who later became a war hero, wasn't there because he had drowned. His new life, his do over, was not working and he was frustrated and miserable. But we all know in the end. He woke up on the bridge where his do over began and let's just say God granted him a return to his real life with all the aches and pains and all those problems and he found not only the love of God, but the love of so many friends. He was happy to have his old life back, warts and all. He didn't need a do over. He just needed to find the truth and believe and his guardian angel helped him see the 'light' and let it transform his life to know it was a wonderful life he was living....the good...the bad...the ugly.

In the beginning God created for us a wonderful life full of great promises. He promised always to be with us. He promised if we would be his people he would be our God. Even through tough times and some of those rebellions he said if we would turn from all that evil stuff he would forgive his people and give them another chance. "If my people who are called by my name pray, seek forgiveness....I will hear from heaven and heal their land."

We might wish we could have some mulligan's in this life, but we know it will not happen. We won't get any do over's. However we can find forgiveness for when we have made wrong decisions.

This morning is communion Sunday. What a perfect time to renew our faith in a God who gave us his son so that whoever will believe in him can find eternal life. It's God's way he provided for a spiritual do over.

Now that's the kind of do over we can handle.

“In the beginning was the Word....and he came to dwell among ushe came from the Father full of Grace and truth....from the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Christ.”

“This is a day of new beginnings, time to remember and move on, time to believe what love is bringing, laying to rest the pain that’s gone....Christ is alive and goes before us to show and share what love can do. This is a day of new beginnings; our God is making all things new.”

A new day...a new year.....a new life. May the peace and joy of God go with you as we enter a new year trusting in the same God.....amen!