

Isaiah 43:1-7

Psalms 29

Acts 8:14-17

Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

Sermon January 13th 2019

God and New Beginnings

14 days ago, many of us gathered with family and friends ready to ring in the new year. We created our famous but rarely successful new years resolutions list. We said goodbye to all the garbage we put up with in 2018. We said a prayer hoping that 2019 will be a better year. Maybe you were even fortunate enough to start off the new year with a midnight kiss. That's if you weren't passed out on the couch. Since bedtime for most of us is probably quite a few hours earlier.

We repeat this ritual every year when the calendar turns from December 31st to January 1st. Hoping for a new beginning. Hoping that no matter what happened in 2018, 2019 will be different. Will be better.

Living in a world where we experience suffering. Where things don't always go our way. We look forward to new beginnings. We look forward to those days where we experience new life. Even if we have to create this day in our calendar.

And of course, January 1st isn't the only day where we possibly experience a new beginning. For example, starting a new friendship. Or reconciling with an old friend. Or getting married. Or becoming a parent. Or starting at a new school. Or moving to a new place. Or getting a new job. Or purchasing a new house. Or refurbishing an old piece of furniture. Or renovating a property. Or healing from an illness. Or rehabbing from an addiction. Or improving your physical health. Or receiving forgiveness.

Life is all about new beginnings. And even though new beginnings can come with some anxiety and apprehension. New beginnings come with hope. New beginnings come with new opportunities. New beginnings refresh and renew us. Helping us grow.

When John comes out to the wilderness the people are longing for January 1st. They have lived in oppression way too long and are ready for the

messiah to come. Ready to feel renewed. Ready for someone to come along and give them something to hope in. Ready for a new beginning.

So, John invites them to come to the Jordan river to receive a ritual cleansing called baptism. A ritual that acted as a form of repentance and forgiveness washing away all those bad things that occurred up to that moment. Giving them a new beginning to hope in.

In all the excitement the people are wondering if John is the messiah who has finally come. John clarifies their misunderstanding by reaffirming his role as the messenger and Jesus' role as the messiah.

Then comes Jesus to join in with all the others and get baptized. To bring in the new year. To invite us all into a new beginning. A new beginning that Jesus experiences in his baptism, as in this moment, Jesus begins his ministry. A new beginning we all experience, as we join Jesus in baptism. A new beginning for the whole world. As Jesus inaugurates a new age where God's kingdom will be present challenging the kingdoms that oppress people. Where salvation will be possible not only for an elect few, but for everyone.

The Holy Spirit coming in the form of a dove, reiterates the message we hear from angels singing in our most precious Christmas story. Jesus has come to bring peace on earth.

We go on to hear John say Jesus will do more than baptize us with water. Jesus will baptize us with the Holy Spirit. When we come to the font we experience a new beginning. We receive the gift of the Holy Spirit that invites us and guides us into a life where we follow Jesus' ways. Where like Jesus we have a dove, a symbol of God's peace, dwelling among us. Helping us live out this peace in a world filled with conflict. Where we hear God say to you and I, "this is my child with whom I am well pleased." Where we are cleansed and forgiven.

Martin Luther talked about baptism as not a one-time act, but a ritual that refreshes us every day. Baptism washes away the brokenness in our lives. Unfortunately, everyday we are impacted by this brokenness. So even though we come to the font once to receive the word and the waters; these waters, these words, stick with us. They continue to breathe new life into

us. Giving us a new beginning every day. Giving us hope that today will go better than yesterday.

In our worship liturgies we have special rites that invite us back to the font to remember our baptism. We don't get baptized again. But, we reaffirm the words that our god parents promised on our behalf. We reaffirm these promises on the day of our confirmation. We reaffirm these promises when we come to a new Christian community. We reaffirm these promises as a community usually during the Easter season.

Sometimes we start off our service with a thanksgiving for baptism rite that helps us remember the daily impact baptism has on us. Our baptism is a new beginning that pours out on us daily new beginnings as we try to live the peace and love Jesus invites us to live out in our world.

And so, John, Jesus, all the leaders in our churches over the centuries invite us to the river. Invite us to the font. Invite us to a new beginning where like Jesus we participate in God's ministry for the world. We imitate Christ in our lives. Preaching and living out the peace, love, and new beginnings God has given us. Inviting us to the New Years party. Shouting with us. Happy New Year!

Let us pray, loving God thank you for new beginnings that give us hope in your promise of restoration and healing for our lives and the world. May we remember our baptism seeing that every day you are breathing new beginnings into our lives. Cleansing us and renewing us so that we can continue your ministry in the world. **Amen.**