

New Beginnings
by Mary Lou Prevost
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Isaiah 43:16-19

"This is what the LORD says- he who made a way through the sea, a path through the mighty waters, "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland. "

Happy New Year!

This is a good day! Coming to this church with a grateful heart to worship with our friends on Sunday is always a really good day. And, today is even more special because it is the first Sunday of a brand-new year. A New Beginning.

"A New Year is like a new baby - many changes will occur. Some of the obvious, of course like a baby, will be stinky ones, while other changes will be challenging, some rewarding, and some may even be interrupting." If you think about it, most new beginnings like a new child, a new job, a new relationship, a different location or another life altering event can all present a challenge of varying degrees.

However, we are each continually experiencing new beginnings. Every second brings a fresh beginning, every hour holds a new promise, every night our dreams can bring hope, and every day is what we each choose to make it. God knew from the time of creation, that we would need new beginnings to provide change in our lives; for without it, we would become bored and disinterested in life itself; and I know, this is not what our loving God intended for our lives.

The scriptures are filled with stories of God offering new beginnings. God frees the oppressed; Jesus heals and restores, and the Holy Spirit instills new life.

- After the flood, God set a rainbow in the sky to show that we were given a promise of a new beginning.
- When the Children of Israel crossed over the Jordan river into the land of Canaan, God told them that they had "not passed this way before." God gave them a new beginning.
- David sinned and repented, and God gave him a new beginning.
- Jesus established a New Covenant, which was an opportunity to all of us for a new beginning.

As we face the New Year with its new beginnings, one thing people commonly do is make New Year's resolutions. One young boy asked his father what his new year's resolution was, and his father said he was going to do everything possible in the new year to make his mother very happy.

The boy asked his mother what hers was, and she said, to do everything possible to make sure your father keeps his resolution.

Why do we make resolutions anyway? Perhaps we make them because there are areas in our lives we are either unhappy with, or areas in our lives we want to be better. A survey was completed a few years back and the number one resolution in America was — can you guess? - to lose weight. This is why we are inundated

with advertisements to purchase exercise equipment this time of year and gyms like Planet Fitness offer new year deals for \$10 a month because they know there are literally millions of potential customers out there with their New Year's resolution to lose weight. They want to strike while the iron's hot so to speak because they know from experience, that soon after we have paid our money, that an astounding 80% of us will abandon our resolutions after the first week or so of the new year. After cashing in big time on our abandoned resolutions, it is business as usual for them.

A wife came into the bathroom to see her husband standing on the scales with his stomach sucked in. She told him that sucking in his stomach wouldn't make it any better. He said it would, because if he didn't suck it in, he couldn't read the numbers on the scale. Perhaps he needs some exercise equipment.

As we come into another new year with maybe second thoughts of how we are going to keep our new resolutions we made just 5 days ago, or perhaps with no resolutions at all, which is also fine, I would suggest that it's not too late to stop and first consider how to prepare ourselves for the New Year in the most positive way possible. Maybe we can do this by thinking what it is that we should be leaving behind us. By leaving it behind, I mean, don't keep revisiting those things or memories that don't do us any good. As an example, one of those things might be the feeling, or if you have been doing it for any length of time - the practiced behavior - of resentment. Each of us resent something. We might resent something we have said and done, or we might resent what someone else has said and done. But along with resentment comes un-forgiveness. Un-forgiveness is something that festers and grows uglier as time passes and never helps anyone as we continue to hold on to it.

Jesus said that if we forgive, God will forgive us. But if we do not forgive, God will not forgive us. I think we all understand that to forgive does not mean the same thing as to forget. We can't erase our memories, and we probably couldn't if we tried, but we can erase our resentment if we make up our mind to do so. Worry is another one of those things we would benefit from, by leaving them behind. Worries are very much like rocking chairs. They give you something to do, but they never take you anywhere while you're doing it. Worry creates anxiety. We worry and become anxious mainly about two things: Things we can change and things we cannot change. Jesus talks about worry and anxiety more than a few times, and he reminds us how much God loves us and how God can give us rest from our needless anxiety.

We need to follow Jesus' teaching to not worry or become anxious, to forget the former things and do not dwell on the past. When you think about it, there is absolutely nothing that we can change from the past. Not one word, not one action, not the regret, not the negative feelings, not continually beating up on ourselves with the would of, should of, could of scenarios, not the sleepless nights, not the wasted time worrying - absolutely nothing can we change from the past! We need to learn to leave negative things where they belong - In the past and move on.

We can meet the new challenges of 2020 when we make the decision to look at things from a different perspective. Instead of looking at your thoughts and feelings of resentment from the negative side, start looking at it from the positive side. What could possibly be the positive side of that you might ask. When you remember those negative things and subsequent feelings, as each of us tend to do, look at them as an example of what you do not ever want to feel again. Stop that negative thought you've conjured up in your mind and think of something - anything positive that makes you happy - beautiful surroundings, stained glass, flowers, sunshine, something just as simple as a smile from a stranger, or my very favorite, the sweet laughter of a child. We can change our entire perspective if we just focus on the positive.

The mistakes from yesterday will now be just lessons learned. So, forget those things which hurt you, and forgive yourself and those people who did or said them. I believe it can be summed up by just saying that anything in our lives that keep us from fully focusing on God - our Source, should be left behind. Being a Christian means to always be going forward. And as we move forward, we are always doing two things: We leave one place and go into another. When we leave, let us leave behind those parts of ourselves that do us no good. Let us embrace our new beginnings.

I am grateful today for the knowledge that we are connected to God and God is connected to us, and we are all one. I am thankful that every day is a New Beginning. And isn't it nice to know that tomorrow is a new day with no mistakes in it yet. Make good memories every day beginning now which, by the way, is a really good day to begin.

May it be so. Amen.