

NEW BEGINNINGS – 2018 In Review

12/27/15

2 Corinthians 5:17

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

I haven't watched any, but I've seen television programs that are presenting a 2018 in review. They predictably depict the good, the bad, the beautiful and the ugly, the dramatic and the spiritual. The programs illustrate all that happened in 2018, at least from a particular perspective. The same program ran at the end of 2017 and will run again at the end of 2019. These shows are not just entertaining, but as long as it is impartial and without judgment; they can be a good review of where we were and where we are.

Did you ever wonder while you were in High School what it would be like to transfer to a new school at the beginning of your Senior year? Suppose you had been shy all of your life. Now you had the opportunity to go to a new place where you were unknown. They didn't know that you were timid and withdrawn. You didn't have to live up to anyone's expectations - now you could be outgoing and exuberant.

Perhaps you were an athlete but had the desire to sing in a choir. Of course you couldn't do that in your other school, because you'd be laughed at. But here, you could sing and be accepted, because no one else knew the difference. You could change your study habits

and become an excellent student instead of being a partier that people expected of you.

Now let's come back to the present. Do we still live a life that meets other people's expectations? Do we behave in a particular manner because that's what we're "supposed to do?" Do we have a specific vocabulary, mind-set, religious belief, political bent, attitude toward others, because of the people around us?

Next week is burning bowl Sunday, one of my favorite Sundays of the year. It is a spiritual celebration and ritual in which we release the things that we don't want or need any longer.

With the rebirth of the Christ spirit within us, we take a fresh new look at our lives. We begin again. Of course we have choices: we can continue along the path we have been pursuing, or we can change direction.

Between now and next week, I would like us to make a 2018 review of our life. Do we have baggage, whether emotional, physical or mental, that we would like to be rid of? Do we have skills that we'd like to develop, talents we'd like to bolster? Do we have counterproductive behaviors that we'd like to give up, and replace with more constructive behaviors? What are our strengths? What are we good at? What have we done this year that has given us pleasure? How have we been in service to our family, friends, our church, our community or other people?

Review your 2018 as objectively as possible. The goal is to look at our life non-judgmentally, as much from a God-perspective as possible. Let's see our self as a divine, spiritual being, and know that we are in the process of becoming a better human being. We can consider what endings to bring to completion so that we can start our new beginnings.

At one point in Thomas Edison's life, he stood with his family as they watched their home and his laboratory burn to the ground. His family and friends stood by him and exclaimed, "How sad you must be to see all of your life's work be destroyed." Edison replied, "Sad? No, I'm not sad. In fact, what a relief to see all of my errors and missteps put behind me."

Philosopher and spiritual teacher Ken Wilbur suggests that the evolution of all phenomena occurs through "transcending and including": things don't totally change and become something new; the old is not wiped out. Rather, transformation occurs through including 'what was' into a more complex matrix. Over thousands of years of human evolution, rational thought has not eliminated emotion, but has included it into a greater developmental level of consciousness. At our best as a species, we are intelligent and compassionate thinking and feeling organisms capable of dynamic, creative, and complex interaction and problem solving.

New beginnings are born out of former endings. We try to teach our children this lesson: put things away before you pull out new toys to play with. We don't throw away a toy before we play with another;

no. We include it in our assortment of possible toys; it is a valuable component within our growing compilation of joy. We must do the same in our own lives: put away the old before embracing the new, while allowing it to be a part of who we are.

The challenge in this process is releasing what is broken and cannot be repaired or is no longer necessary. Sometimes we can't see what is unnecessary in our own lives but see it clearly in other people's lives. Sometimes we know exactly what needs to be released, but we cling to it anyway, secure in our habits and its familiarity.

Although we use December 25th as the birthday of Jesus, and use Christmas as the time to fill with giving, love, hope, peace and life, we can celebrate Christmas on a daily basis. We can always be loving and giving, and filled with peace and joy. Christ can be reborn within us every day.

The same is true with beginnings, because Christ is the beginning and the end, the Alpha and the Omega. Although we take the ending of a calendar year to symbolically represent the time to begin again - out with the old, in with the new - we also know that daily we have the capability to begin again. Daily we can release our old unproductive ways and initiate the new. We can transcend what we were while including all the good, beneficial, and honorable of us and letting go of the ineffective, hurtful, and useless.

Author C.S. Lewis said, "The more we let God take us over, the more truly ourselves we become - because He made us. He invented

us. He invented all the different people that you and I were intended to be. It is when I turn to Christ, when I give up myself to His personality, that I first begin to have a real personality of my own.”

That is what the Christ brings to us... a chance to start again, to move forward under new guidance. The Christ offers us a new path and new choices. Our old habits and thought patterns, other people's opinions and expectations have no power over us except that which we allow. We alone determine our actions, beliefs, and thoughts. We can change; we can make another choice.

Isaiah 43:18-19

“Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.

So, let us take a good long look at ourselves this week: examining our life as we celebrate the New Year, the new moment, the new ‘now’. Let's release what is no longer working to best advantage and try something new. There is no shame in wanting to be a better person and making the active attempt. We are all in the process together, sharing experiences, growing together. As a church family let us support each other in our attempts to change, evolve, and transcend; let us recognize and appreciate the Christ in ourselves and each other. Happy New Year.

Let us pray...