



NARRATIVE 1

SEPTEMBER 6/7, 2014

FIRST, MARSHALL

(GENESIS 1:1-2:4a; JOHN 1:1-5)

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“New Beginnings”

Dear friends in Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Please join me in prayer: *Prepare our hearts, Lord, to receive your Word. Silence in us any voice but your own that in hearing we may believe and in believing we may obey your will revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Amen.*

In the beginning...

New beginnings can cause us to feel excitement and anxiety, thrills and chills, eagerness for the future...as well as regrets for the past.

That’s what I loved about my years spent in school – not the **work** I had to do, or the **lessons learned**, or **even** the **life** experiences understood... but for **this hard fact**: at the conclusion of a quarter, at the end of every semester, when the final *final* had been turned in...**it was over**...

...and every **first** day of class was another new beginning – another chance to get it right, to start my project months before it was due, to commit myself to doing my homework **every** night, instead of cramming it all into the night before it was due...sound familiar to some of you??

That education-year foundation contributed to my feeling of *future-shock* (Alvin Toffler, Future Shock, 1970, *too much change in too short a period of time*) when I finally graduated from the seminary.

For there, experiencing my first new beginning in the *real world*...I quickly came to learn that’s where class **never** ends, where quarters **keep on coming**, where **semesters** slip into epochs of time...

Truly, the way the calendar kept coming at me was the big shock... It took me that whole first year to discover that if you’re not thinking of, planning for and imagining about...the next two or three seasons or projects down the road, then you’re already too late...

On top of that, the **real** world has its **own** version of new beginnings – some are filled with absolute blessings...others are defined by grief and loss...while still others are a strange mixture of both.

15 years ago, Carolyn and I, along with our two kids, Mark and Rachel, moved from St. Peter, Minn., to Anchorage, Alaska. The January day that we moved into our new house, it snowed over 10 inches, the sun didn't rise until 10:30 in the morning, and set at 3:30 in the afternoon. **Everything** was dark – including our moods!

Mark was half-way through his sophomore year in h.s., and Rachel half-way through her freshman year. Our new beginning as a family was anything but enjoyable.

Every evening we'd gather around the supper table and Carolyn would ask the kids how school went, who they ate lunch with, if they'd made any friends... They finally said, *Mom, we don't have any friends and we're just fine eating by ourselves – please don't ask again...*

There were lots of **tears** during those first months of late winter in Alaska...but then the sun came out, the snow melted, the kids made friends at both church and school – and that painful new beginning evolved into an experience that proved to be a wonderful blessing for us all.

Our Bible passage for today takes us back to the very first new beginning, the opening scenes of creation. There God speaks and things happen, there God calls forth life from sea, earth and sky, and there God blesses us – all creatures great and small – that we might live with a sense of purpose and joy.

From light out of darkness, and dry land out of the sea, and in the sky the gift of light – by both day and night – the earth, it seems, is being prepared for the crowning act of creation. Says the Lord God on the 6th day, *Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness...* and so it all began.

Here's a question for you to think about: **what's the point of this story of creation?**

- To explain who made the earth and heavens?
- To explain how everything in creation fits together?
- To give us a sense of purpose beyond ourselves?
- ???

Craig Koester, Professor of New Testament at Luther Seminary, says that the main point of Genesis 1 is, simply, to introduce us...to God. From beginning to end, and everything in between, this story is about God as the focal point, the foundation, the fulcrum upon which balances everything in life – from the cosmos, to countries, to clans, to creatures...it is God – and God’s involvement – in every stage and aspect of life, that makes this new beginning good, that makes life good, that makes every new beginning in life ultimately good...

We ordinary human beings are absolutely unable to determine whether any new beginning experience will prove to be a blessing or a challenge. We are gifted with the ability to imagine how an event *might* unfold, how long our lives *could* last, what *we think* it will be like to live in eternity with God...

But the hard fact of life is...we’re pretty much limited to focusing on... *one day at a time*... There is a treasure of blessings in that little phrase from Alcoholics Anonymous - *one day at a time*...

We would like to solve the problems of our lives and the world by issuing edicts, making promises, passing laws...

But the truth of the matter is that we’re really only a little bit in control of how we live our lives... And though that may seem quite limiting, and hardly important for doing anything about life’s big concerns – it is the way that God has ordained life for us – and it’s also the **cradle** for a **beautiful blessing**.

Last evening we baptized little Owen Vollmer. Though he’s already a few months old, yesterday he began life anew again. His parents and this congregation gave to him that gift of being born again into a life of relationship with the Author of Life. And here’s where this one-day-at-a-time stuff gets really good. Every single day of our lives is, in fact, a new beginning for us, a new experience of putting our sinful past behind us, and rising again to embrace God’s gift of faith, hope and love.

In a short commentary on prayer, Martin Luther encourages us to begin and end every day by making the sign of the cross and then uttering a simple prayer. We are to thank God for protecting us, for forgiving us, and for helping us lead lives that serve the Gospel.

We live in an age when we don't even need our imaginations to come up with ways to avoid focusing on God. From YouTube to the boob tube and everything in between, it's a miracle, I suppose, that anyone takes their faith seriously anymore.

So that is why this story of the new beginning of creation is so **important**, so **vital**, so **crucial** to our walk through this thing called life. It is, indeed, a story about God – and God's intention to be intimately involved in every aspect of our lives.

It is also an invitation for us to make each new day a new beginning as a child of faith. It's an invitation to trust that as we pray, and as we live each day ***one at a time***, God is blessing that holy image within each of us, reminding us that we have been called and claimed to live in such a way that everyone sees – in themselves and in one another – the mark of God's Image, God's Presence, God's Spirit on their hearts and in their lives.

This is the day that the Lord has made...let us rejoice and be glad in it! Amen.