

Sermon – “Endings and Beginnings” 5-27-2018

Grace and Peace – Pause and Reflect...begins and ends the day with us – Creator – Redeemer and Sanctifier...

There is a sweet story told of an imagined conversation among twins in utero waiting to be born – they are speculating on what happens after the birth process. One twin is convinced that birth is the end of life as they know it – it will all be over. The other twin argues that it is a new beginning - full of new opportunities.// They are both correct. Life as they knew it ends, and new life begins.

In our Gospel; Nicodemus said to Jesus, ‘How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?’(John 3: 4) Is it possible to begin again? Apparently the answer is “Yes!” Well not quite, but sort of.

To quote T. S. Eliot, we hear of endings that are not endings and beginnings that are not beginnings; ‘In my beginning is my end... In my end is my beginning’ He writes.

These are great words from the poet T.S. Eliot which capture something about the mystery and confusion associated with the beginnings and endings of living. Is a new beginning an ending or is an ending a new beginning? The answer of course is both - Recently I was reminded of such confusion when talking to one of my clients about her dad’s death. She told me that she had sat with him as he took his last few breaths, she shared; ‘I felt like I was encouraging the birthing process even though he was dying’.

Beginnings and endings also pose the question; for whom is it a beginning or an ending? A new beginning for one person such as the birth of a new baby may bring immense joy, yet for

another it is an end to a peaceful night's sleep! A beginning of a new treatment which brings breakthrough for the medical profession can also mean an ending for a family member whose life is dramatically changed.

In the Bible beginnings and endings are very important themes it seems. The first four words of the bible are 'In the beginning, God' and in John's gospel; 'In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the word was God. He was with God in the beginning.'

One particular ending was that of Jesus on the cross as he faced his own death. In those last few moments he cried out; My God, My God, why have you forsaken me? He acknowledged his own pain, suffering and an ending which was also a NEW beginning, which many couldn't see at time.

The theme of beginnings and endings has significance for all of us who are disciples. We may find it helpful to 'pay attention' to our beginnings and endings' on a daily basis;

Pay attention to our emotions - Inevitably there is pain associated with endings. If we fail to acknowledge them our losses can get buried resulting in our souls feeling way too heavy. If they are not attended to, eventually we can be weighed down with the burden of that keeps us from moving forward as disciples in God's plan for this world. A helpful question we might ask is; who helps us to pay attention to our emotions when dealing with endings? I am thankful to have people in my life that I consider spiritual companions who will check in with me about how I feel and how this connects with my spiritual path – this is more than vocational goals – it is spiritual direction. These questions get to the core of my spirituality and how do I feel about my own endings – transition points in my life.

And when it comes to beginnings, let's celebrate and allow space to start new beginnings well. Think back to when you were part of a new beginning and what empowered you or others to start it well. Maybe it wasn't that long ago or maybe it was...contemplate that new beginning for a moment. What was it like? How did it feel? How did it impact your life?

The book of Psalms can be a Spiritual Guide. The psalms are a great basis for encouraging disciples/followers to be honest and true to oneself and God – to move from the extremes from despair to joy! Psalms are a helpful book of the Bible for any of us to focus on so that we might be true to ourselves and others by living lives with integrity of God the Spirit.

Pay attention to other questions too. Each day brings questions surrounding beginnings and endings. Jane Day in the journal entitled "Next Leadership" suggested using these questions as we face our own beginnings and endings in daily life:

1. What beginnings and endings are you experiencing at the moment?
2. What fears are you experiencing about your new beginnings?
3. When did you last acknowledge an ending and what did it look like?
4. What hopes do you have for your new beginnings?
5. What holds you back from stepping out into new beginnings?
6. How can others pray for you in your beginnings and endings?
7. How have you experienced God in your endings and beginnings? (source: *Next Leadership 2018, Jane Day - May 2014*)

Nicodemus was a religious leader, and very well educated for his time. Like any typical scholar, Nicodemus begins his conversation with Jesus by prefacing his questions with an evidenced based statement he believed to be true; "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who

has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God." Nicodemus was "religious but not spiritual" in the sense of living his knowledge out in his daily life of faith. People often say to me they are "Spiritual but not Religious" which seems their reason for not attending church, which then begs the question for those of us who attend regularly; "*Are we Religious and not Spiritual?*" Something to mull over as you consider your beginnings and endings, especially on this Memorial Day weekend.

Jesus tells Nicodemus and us that we will be reborn, maybe endlessly, Luther talked about walking wet in the waters of our Baptisms – every day is a new beginning but it is also an ending - an opportunity to grow closer and closer to knowing ourselves in relationship to the One who creates us and finds us lovable without condition – an ending to all those thoughts or actions or feelings which get in the way growing in our relationship with God and one another. "*What new beginnings is God urging you toward today?*" In all your beginnings and endings, may you know the reassuring presence of the One who is the same yesterday, today and forever. Our one God; Who is Creator – Redeemer and Sanctifier – One, yet three – our Trinity! Amen