

2021 01 03 – New Beginnings

John 1:1-18 (The Inclusive Bible)

As I'm writing this sermon, the morning sun is shining on the snow covered fields outside my window. I woke up this morning to a brand new year. Just a few hours ago I watched Canada's New Years Eve and did the countdown with Rick Mercer on CBC Toronto. Yes, I'll admit it, I cheated and was in bed before the clock struck midnight here in Swift Current. But it still seemed important to participate in the countdown to the New Year and to sing the traditional Auld Lang Syne.

Every twelve months we go through this ritual of welcoming the New Year. But it's all kind of meaningless, isn't it? Who are we to say when the New Year begins? Our current calendar is the Gregorian, introduced in 1582. But the Eastern Orthodox Church still uses the Julian calendar. And, of course, the Chinese New Year is based on the lunar cycle and is different again.

So why recognize it at all? What is it that we are celebrating? What makes New Year's Eve so special? Is it just another excuse for a party? Of course, this year we didn't really get a chance to party, did we? All around the world, social gatherings were restricted. Even Times Square was practically empty on December 31st. And that's not all! Most of us just went through Christmas holidays without getting a chance to hug our aging parents, our children, our grandchildren our aunts and uncles, our nieces and nephews. It's been an abnormally quiet month, without our usual Christmas or New Years celebrations.

In fact, it's been a strange and difficult year. And, if my Facebook feed is any indication, no one is sorry that the year 2020 is behind us. So what is it that we are celebrating?

I think, for me, it's the possibility of new beginnings. It certainly feels like our world could do with a complete change in reality. And most of us, no matter how old, or how young, have something in our lives that we would like to change, or something that needs to change, even if we are choosing to ignore it. A new year seems to offer a blank slate on which to rewrite, if not our entire existence, then at least some small portion of our living, of our being.

Like the New Year, today's scripture also offers the possibility of new beginnings.

In the Gospel of John we read:

“In the beginning there was the Word;
the Word was in God's presence,
and the Word was God.

The Word was present to God from the beginning.”

First we need to spend some time exploring the language in this ancient poem.

Most versions of the Bible have translated the Greek word “Logos” as “the Word.”

But Logos could also be translated as “reason” or “wisdom” or “universal truth.” I

think of Logos, or “the Word” as God's truth, God's love, God's essence revealed to us.

The author of the Gospel of John tells us that through Jesus “the Word became flesh and stayed for a while among us.” Jesus was Logos, the Word, the revelation of God. Through Jesus’ birth, life, death and resurrection we are able catch a glimpse, a new understanding, of the grace, the truth, and the love that is the Holy Mystery.

But the Gospel of John makes it clear that the Word was with us even before Jesus’ birth. “In the beginning there was the Word... Through the Word all things came into being.” So, in fact, creation itself is a manifestation of the sacred, a revelation of God that has been present for billions of years. Many of today’s biblical scholars use the term Cosmic Christ to describe the revelation of God made known to us first through the creation of the universe and then, even more directly, through a human being, a man, named Jesus.

And the good news is that Logos, the Word, the Cosmic Christ is still actively revealing God’s love to us, in the year 2021. And with those revelations come that possibility of re-creation, of new beginnings. So where do we look, where do we find Logos, the Cosmic Christ today?

On Christmas morning, I saw the wonder of God revealed in a glorious sunrise and I took a picture to remind me of the sacred beauty of creation. That’s the picture that you have before you in today’s PowerPoint. Each morning we are greeted by the light of the sun and some mornings we even get treated to a sky filled with brilliant shades of red and yellow and purple. It’s as if the Cosmic Christ is saying, “Good morning and welcome to a brand new day. A day filled

with endless possibilities. A day filled with new beginnings just waiting to happen!”

There are mornings, of course, when it’s difficult to appreciate God’s creation. Mornings when the weight of the world seems to be on our shoulders and even the sun can’t take away the darkness in our hearts.

It’s in those times, that God’s love is revealed not just through the natural beauty of creation, but also through the humans in our lives. It is in those times that the Cosmic Christ appears in the form of a smile that lights up a whole face so that it can be seen even through a mask. It is in those times that the Word comes with a knock on the door, a phone call, a text or an email. Through these human connections, we are reminded that we are not alone, that God’s love is with us and that it is unconditional and everlasting. Through these human connections, we can see “a Light that shines in the darkness.” Through these human connections we feel the possibility of a turning, a new beginning within us.

But, the problem is, we don’t always recognize or acknowledge the Word, when it comes into our lives. The gospel tells us:

“The Word was coming into the world—
was in the world—
and though the world
was made through the Word,
the world didn’t recognize it.”

That was true in Jesus' time and is also true today. Too often we ignore God's love, God's truth, even when it is right in front of us because acknowledging that truth requires us to change. And change is hard, isn't it! New beginnings are not easy.

Most of us follow along the same path, even if it is a rough one, until we are forced to change. 2020 was a year of many changes. Our lives were turned upside down. Many of us were dragged—kicking and screaming—into a world of technology that we never wanted to enter. We were forced to use Facetime, Skype, or Zoom just to stay connected to family, friends and even our church.

As we enter into 2021, with its promise of new beginnings, we need to ask ourselves, "What learnings from the past year will we bring with us? What changes are worth keeping? What revelations are still to come?"

As we enter into 2021, may our hearts be open to see the light that shines in the darkness, to hear Logos, the Word when it is spoken, and to explore, with courage, God's new beginnings. Amen.