

Weekly Devotions
South Holburn Church
24th August 2021

READINGS

New beginnings are exciting, but they are frightening too! We are on a learning curve when we do something new and it is out of our control. Yet God is right there with us through it all! We are all in a new beginning or in some cases a renewal of what has been in the past.

It has been more than 18 months since I sat in a Starbucks and worked on something with my computer and coffee in hand. I wish I could say it was because I have given up drinking expensive coffee, but rather it is of course, due to the pandemic. Covid 19 has changed all of our lives and daily patterns. But now we have an opportunity for new beginnings!

17 So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; 19 that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. 20 So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. 21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

1 Corinthians 5:17-21 (NRSVA)

Paul writes to the Corinthians about their new beginnings in faith. Whatever sins and struggles they carry with them they can release and walk in the newness of life. They have been made right with God because of Jesus' work on the cross for them. They have become ambassadors or representatives of Christ in the world. We have that same relationship with God when we confess our sin and brokenness and ask for a fresh beginning with God. The good news is that it is offered to each of us and there is nothing we can do to earn it! It is also a blessing to know that we can redeem our relationships and everything about our lives as well.

Yes, not only do we make mistakes as a person, but so do we as a people and so does the institution of the church! Sometimes we have focused on the wrong priorities and put buildings and tradition before people and God's love. Sometimes we have lost our way in following Jesus but always, with gentleness, the Holy Spirit leads us back to God!

As we look at a world where things are beginning to go back to normal, we have an opportunity at re-creation. Our habits and old ways of doing things have all been turned upside down and we can now look at our community with fresh eyes.

South Holburn will soon be going back to teas and coffees after worship and no more booking phone calls (starting September 5th). Though we will still wear masks and respect social distances, we can now spend time in each other's company in a way we have not done for many months. What have you missed most? What would you like to do

differently? Perhaps this is an opportunity to think of people who might be hurting or who still feel lonely or confused with continuing restrictions. Perhaps instead of standing in our usual groups why not meet someone new? Why not do more than just say “Hiya” (see I am getting some of the lingo! LOL) and actually want to know how others are really doing? Perhaps make a plan to catch up with someone during the week or even reach out to someone you have not seen back at church, just to see how they are doing? We are ambassadors of God's love...how can you show it to others this week?

4 When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory. 5 Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly...seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices 10 and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator. 11 In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!

12 As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. 13 Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. 14 Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. 15 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God 17 And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Colossians 3:4-5a, 9b-17

In the text above Paul is writing to the Colossians and encouraging them to put off their old ways and put on their new life just like they would their garments. It is hard to imagine what it looks like to change behaviour, but it is so much easier to see a changed life in someone. We will be meeting all kinds of people we have not seen in months, will they see a difference in you? Will they notice that you have drawn closer to God and allowed his compassion and forgiveness to rule in your heart? Maybe you feel that you have not done so, and that you have been distant from God. Let me tell you there is no time like the present. Each of us has an opportunity to claim the new life we have in Christ as we are freely offered a new start...just ask the Lord for it and it will be yours! We do not have to be brought down by the struggles of this world. We can be overcomers!

REFLECTION

Thomas Merton wrote 'By reading the scriptures I am so renewed that all nature seems renewed around me and with me. The sky seems to be a pure, cooler blue, the trees a deeper green. The whole world is charged with the glory of God and I feel fire and music under my feet.'

Scripture can give us that sense of renewal and new beginnings that we long for in our inner beings. We cannot manufacture new hope, but we can read the texts above and so many more that remind us we are offered a sense of starting over at every corner of our lives. Beginnings as I said at the start of this devotional can be difficult and scary, but they can also be exciting. We take with us all we have learned along the way and we open ourselves up to new adventures.

Are you willing to begin an adventure following Jesus as South Holburn begins to return to a new normal? Are you ready to walk a familiar path but with a different tune? The Holy Spirit will guide each of us as we trust the Lord to show us the way!

As most of you already know, our family is beginning a new adventure with Peterhead New Parish Church in September. We will take all of you with us in our hearts and will look forward to staying in touch and hearing how God is leading you in your adventures as well.

Hopefully some of you will be able to come up for the induction or the "preaching in" on the first Sunday that I begin. David will hopefully be helping with worship and your presence would be such a blessing! I am sure he will keep you informed of the details when they become available.

Bill Graham said *'My home is in Heaven. I'm just traveling through this world.'*

Each of us has roots in another world...this world is not our own. Our hope, our assurance, our marching orders, our faith, and so much more comes from our understanding that we look to a future where every tear will be wiped away and where heaven and earth will be renewed. We live with this knowledge so as to have hope, but we must remember the pain we and our neighbors face is real and we need to walk with one another through the fires. Johnny Cash sang *'You're shinin' your light, and shine it you should, / But you're so heavenly minded you're no earthly good'* ("No Earthly Good," from *The Rambler*, 1977). I know each of you will be that 'friend' to one in need in your sphere of influence. South Holburn will continue to be a lighthouse on a hill for all of Aberdeen and beyond to see the love of Jesus as the church embraces new opportunities and re-creation. I am excited to see how God will use each of us in his kingdom in the coming days and years!

With much love and deep gratitude for your love,

Julia

PRAYER

Loving God,
Thank you that we are new creations in Christ.

We are given opportunities to begin again and to start over each moment of the day.

We may feel unable, overwhelmed or afraid, but you give us hope and assurance you will walk beside us and never leave us!

Thank you for your love and mercy which we are given the privilege of sharing with a hurting world.

Help us to embrace change and to be there for one another in uncertain times.
Thank you that the days are becoming different and the restrictions are lifting.

We pray we use this time to change course if we need to do so, to see those around us we have missed and to open our eyes and ears to all you have for us!

In Jesus name we offer our prayers,
Amen.

