

A friend posted on Facebook on New Year's Eve these words of wisdom from the Salvation Army for 2016: "***You can't start the next chapter of your life if you keep re-reading the last one.***" Not bad advice for the beginning of a new year. And, yet the old chapter is still there. Constantly calling us back!

Jesus was and is the beginning of a new chapter. John tells us that he was a part of the process. He was there in the beginning (John 1:1). It is good to be a part of the beginning process. If we are, we know the process, the thoughts, the ideas, the discussions that got us to where we are today. The steps taken along the way (the Law). Jesus was from the beginning.

We have a friend in LA who worked for the Jet Propulsion Lab and was a part of the first Mars Rover project. He was in on the plans from the beginning to when the Rover landed on Mars and began its journey. He delights in telling how his name (and the other engineers') is on Mars. They etched their names on parts of the Rover! He did not have to be "read" into the project - he was there from the beginning.

There was nothing in the process that Jesus was not aware of. He was in agreement with the process and now comes willingly as part of God's plan. He comes revealing God's plan for all of creation. God is now calling a people home, not just one nation but all peoples. God's full plan for the Kingdom is revealed in Christ. Did you notice those whom Jeremiah includes: the blind, the lame, the outcast, the widows, the orphans. These are not the ones whom you expect — these are those who are on the outside, now included in the homecoming.

Now, there are still those who want to keep rereading the last chapter - again and again. They are comfortable with the idea of Law - grace is not on their agenda. They like the idea of being the "chosen" — the very people of God. Of course, they have forgotten what they were chosen for: to be the people of God showing the world what a nation under God is like. They wanted to keep the good ole days. The Good Ole Days was the name of a magazine my grandmother used to get. Enjoyed reading it but wondered if they were really the good ole days. It seems like a wash tub and a creek were not as good as one remembers! And, after getting an automatic washing machine, she was not inclined to go back to her old wringer one.

The religious leaders wanted to keep the Law - they could not deal with grace (we still have a hard time). Yes, they knew the ancestors had failed to keep the Law. They knew God had rescued them time after time but... we are a new generation. Let us try to keep it, reread the last chapter again. Maybe it will turn out differently this time - it never does.

2016 - How new is it? Have things really changed much since midnight Thursday? When you finally woke up on Friday morning were things any different? Is the news this morning any different than the news was last Sunday? What is this new beginning we have in Christ? It isn't new unless we are willing to move forward into the next chapter.

Paul, writing to the Church in Philippi, says, "...*forgetting what is behind I press forward...*" (Phil 3:17). So often we want to drag yesterday into today. We want change without changing. We long for a new tomorrow while hanging onto yesterday. Even if the past was great - it was yesterday and our call is to move forward. Paul says that our calling is to continue to move forward and to grow in Christ-like-ness. We do not forget the past but use it as a tool to learn from. There are those lessons we learned that we should not forget - a hot stove burns! But we go forward with new hopes and dreams.

Christ came with a new direction for the world. The door is now open to all who would come. Everyone is invited to come along for the journey. We join and are joined by others along the way. Our hope grows and the impossible now seems almost possible. The journey is not for one alone - it should be a journey of all the people of God moving together. The Exodus was a journey of maybe a million people. There were ups and downs along the way. There were missteps and misunderstandings and a little rebellion. There were those who wanted to go back and reread the last chapter: we were better off as slaves in Egypt. The end of the journey was the land of promise — a new beginning and a new hope.

We move forward. The years, the days come and in them are the promises of God - the hope of new beginnings. This Table reminds us that out of darkness comes light. Our despair is turned into hope. There is resurrection and life - a new beginning. The invitation—come and join us on this journey — come and be a part of what God has planned - as we follow the road before us. One with the promise of a new day, an everlasting hope.

NIV, New International Bible Society, Zondervan, 1973, 1978, 1985
NRSV, Division of Christian Education, NCC, 1989