

John 3:1-21

"A Fresh Start"

This week in our series on the windows we move into the back corner, where we start with a beginning, a beginning with the birth of Christ. I'll have to admit to you all, that I didn't realize that the picture was that of a cradle with Christ in it. I first looked at it and thought it was a boat, thinking it was the scene of Jesus being out on the water or Jesus calling us to be fishers of men. I am so very glad I said this to you all, so therefore we could have an appropriate sermon this morning.

As a recap for the last few Sundays if you haven't been here, we've discussed the windows on the other side of the sanctuary, where we discussed the inspiration that we can receive from communion, prayer, and from the bible. All of these elements are part of the Christian faith that we hold dear and are elements of our faith that have stood throughout the ages. We'll continue to explore the windows of the church and how we can definitely seek out inspiration for our faith to call us towards being the Christians that we are called to be in Jesus Christ.

Yet with this picture, we are just coming out of the season where we celebrated the birth of Christ. In fact in the liturgical year we are in the time of the year when we need to focus on the life of Christ and the actions that Christ performed while on this earth. There are indeed many numerous stories and lessons that Christ taught us while on earth that we should learn and know by heart. Yet in

all of this, I believe there is an element that we can learn from on this day, even with the window being on the birth of Christ.

The birth of Christ is indeed a very significant moment in the life of the church. It's the beginning of our story as a people known as Christians. It's the fresh start that God promised us in the scriptures. Through the birth of a child we are given the foundation of a faith that we love and experience this very day.

The passage from Luke that details the birth of Christ states that Christ was born in the city of Bethlehem which is present day Palestine, not too far from Jerusalem. He was born in a lowly estate and laid in manger, and the lowest of people, shepherds, came to him to witness the great event of the birth of a Messiah for all people. He wasn't born in a high place in society, but from the lowest end of society, out of the people that Christ would stand up for in his ministry and for all people who need to hear the message of hope and a new life that comes through a relationship with Christ.

It was the beginning of a story of that we know of this day. We spend a whole season of the church in anticipation and preparation of the coming of the Messiah and then we spend a portion of the church year celebrating the birth and recognizing all of the events that came about in the birth of Christ.

But here we are, not in that season of the church. How do we interpret the birth of Christ at this point in the year? How do we go about understanding the

birth of Christ during the rest of the year when we are away from the season of Christmas. This is when I look at a theme of Christ's ministry, a theme of a fresh start for everyone. Can we find inspiration, a theme for our series, in the idea of a fresh start for all people?

In Christ's ministry we see a theme where Christ himself was a fresh start in his birth. He came at a time when the people were under the oppression of the Roman Empire, the Temple had become corrupt, and life was extremely difficult for the average person and even worse for the people at the bottom of society. The world was at a time where hope was needed more than ever and God sent his Son Jesus Christ into the world to be that hope and that fresh start for all people.

In this theme of new starts and a fresh opportunities to people, there are actually countless passages in the bible where God offers the people a new start and a new opportunity to grow in faith in God. They had an opportunity to live out a better life that would be filled with the spirit and have the start needed to be the people that God called them to be. There are three readings I feel where this stands out the most for us in our faith story.

In the beginning of our faith ancestor's history, we have Abraham, the patriarch who was told to leave his home and head to a far away land to start a new life. He was told to leave the land of his ancestor's and go to a place where he could worship God. He was also told that he would be the father to a great nation

and his descendents would be as numerable as the stars. Now that right there is a beginning if there ever was one. It was the beginning to our faith story as well and the start to the people that we encounter in the Bible.

But with this, can you imagine how you would have felt if you had been told by a divine being to leave everything you had and go to a place you had never been to before? I can barely imagine how I would have reacted in this day and age if I had been told this in our modern day. The world outside of our faith community would think I had fallen off of my rocker if I proclaimed that I was to leave everything in Cheyenne behind and head to southeast Asia where I believed God would provide a new life for me. Even in our faith community that would seem strange.

Yet we know that in a new beginning sometimes we'll need to make changes in our lives. We may not have to relocate ourselves physically, but we'll need to relocate ourselves spiritually. To allow the love of God into us when we have not always loved God takes us to a new place within ourselves where we can move forward and become a part of a greater faith story that is far greater than anything we could have accomplished or experienced on our own.

In moving with the theme of a fresh start we can look on the John 3, where we have Christ discussing the idea of being born again and having a new start in the spirit. This is indeed a passage that I believe is especially significant to us as a

community that wants to share the love of Christ to all people. Christ gives us specific instructions on how we are renewed and can experience life again from a fresh perspective.

We have a man named Nicodemus visiting Jesus in this passage asking about how one can be a part of the family of God. We have him asking Christ specific things such as how one can be born from above or be born again after they have left their mother's womb. These are questions that do mean a lot to us today, not just in Nicodemus's time. For Christ was trying to get a point across to Nicodemus that we need to pay attention to in this day of our time as Christian believers.

How often have we heard folks talk about their faith and discuss being "born-again Christians?" The origin of this statement comes right out of this passage of scripture, where it is told that we need to be renewed and born again in the water and the Spirit to be able to enter into the Kingdom of God. This is the way to the eternal life, if we take this understanding right at face value. Yet there is more to this just than just an afterlife. There is more to this than just claiming to be born again. Like much of the scriptures, there is more here at hand.

Looking at this story in the using the story we have in Genesis, I begin to see a story of hope coming forth in this fresh start. Jesus is a descendent of Abraham and it is through Abraham that we have the beginning of the covenant between

God and human. A covenant that would later be fulfilled and renewed through Christ. For we see that in this conversation with Nicodemus we have it that Christ came into this world with a purpose. A purpose that would bring hope and a new life for all people. Just like Abraham had a purpose in going to the land of Canaan.

When I was in my senior year of college, I was faced with an illness that rocked me down to my core. I was shaken and frustrated, lost and confused. I had progressively gotten worse with this condition, and eventually I had ended up in the hospital, where I had to be monitored as the doctors increased medication in me to insanely high levels. It was a very scary time, because I didn't know what lied ahead of me with this illness. I began to have doubts, about life, faith, what I was doing with my life, and pretty much everything and everyone in my life.

It was a dark period in my life. It's a period of time that I call the Dark Night. It's a name that I recalled from some of theologians speaking about their hard times that they experienced in their lives. It was during this time that I began to feel darkness over me and I was uncertain on what would happen next.

However, there was hope in all of this. In time with the chaplain of the hospital we looked at John 3:14-15. It reads that "And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life." Christ had a purpose in his life to bring hope. It is through study of John 3 that I began to get out of the Dark Night, and begin to

experience a new beginning in Christ. It was my time to experience a fresh start in Christ.

It is because of the life of Christ that we are given the new hope. For we know that Christ came into the world not to condemn, but to give the world life. That is what we are about here as Christians. We are about living life and having fresh starts and a new outlook on a better life not just for us, but for all people who we can encounter and share the Gospel that has been given to us.

We are not the only people who need to hear the gospel and recognize this message of a new beginning. Paul writes to us that in Christ we are renewed as well. The key verse in mind is that in 2 Corinthians 5:17. "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new." There is hope in the message. There is hope that in no matter what has happened in a past life or what has happened, there is a fresh start for you.

Some folks take a business model and apply it to ministry. You could do that with me and come to a conclusion, and that is that I am in the business of hope. If I was not able to have hope for people and hope for myself then there is no way that I could stand before you and proclaim the Word of God. As a community that wants to proclaim the Word of God to all people that we interact with then we need to be in the business of hope as well. We need to be ready and willing to offer that

hope and fresh start that has been given to us in Christ. We have much to live for in this community and hope is there ready for us to reach out and embrace.

Today in this message of a fresh start, I am here to offer an invitation to you. I invite you to take a step into hope and be there and ready for Christ to come to you. Christ came on this earth for all people, including you. A fresh start at life is there for you. All you need to do is take and accept that gift of life. It is there for you. It will always be there for you, now and in the future. I encourage you, that if you have questions on this new life that Christ offers, then come and talk with us. I am here to talk with you about your fresh start and as a community we are ready and willing to be with you as you begin the journey in Christ. Come, talk with us, pray with us.

Christ was born for us. Christ was born to come into the world to offer us a new life. That window over there is the beginning of hope. The hope that we can live in all throughout the year, not just at Christmas, not just one time of the year. Hope is everlasting and will be with us no matter what we do. Christ is there, hand extended, with hope, for all people. Amen.