

"New Beginnings"
Rev. Robert H. Wade
January 8, 2012
Mark 1:4-11
Genesis 1:1-5

Did you see the sunrise this morning? No doubt one of the most beautiful sunrises I have ever seen. Brilliant red, orange, and yellow against a sky of velvet blue. Absolutely glorious which underscores our Old Testament reading, ***"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep....and God said, 'Let there be light' and there was light."*** These familiar words form the first lines of the Bible immediately proclaim God as Creator.....God who looks into the formless void and darkness calls forth new beginnings! *"in the beginning God created."*

One of the perceptions many Christians have about the Bible is that it has only one creation story but the truth is the Bible is a long series of new beginnings: Adam and Eve's new beginning after disobeying God.....Abram and Sara's new beginning as they follow God to a land they did not know....Moses' new beginning as the leader of the exodus and the giver of the Law....the Israelites new beginning as they crossed the Jordan River into the Promised Land..... *"in the beginning God created"* and God has not stopped creating new beginnings. God continues to look into the formless void and darkness to create order out of chaos and bring the light of new beginnings.

What are your new beginning stories? Some of us are not as old as our bodies for we have experienced a great awakening of mind or spirit that brought about rebirth....those *ah ha* God moments that changed our lives! Some of us are more alive today than yesterday because a soul mate has come into our lives. Some of us are experiencing a new way of living as the bondage of addiction, or negative thinking or messing living has been broken. *What are your new beginning stories?*

"In the beginning God created...." and we have come to worship that same God who continues to look into the formless void and darkness of our world and create new beginnings. God cannot *not* create! *What is God creating in your life?*

Our Gospel reading for today brings us to the new beginning of Jesus' baptism and gives us a glimpse of the new creation God desires for those who seek Jesus. Baptism is our most profound symbol of God's creative nature.

Mark 1: 4-11

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁶Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. ⁸I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

⁹In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. ¹¹And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

Way out in the wilderness John the Baptist warned the people to set their lives straight and turn their backs on their deceitful ways. He invited them into the baptismal waters of forgiveness and new beginnings and we are told masses of people *"were going to him and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins."* John didn't hold back when calling people to confess their sins. He even called the super religious a *brood of vipers.*" John knew that looking into a mirror and admitting our sin and failure is a prelude to new beginnings.

We Presbyterians follow in John the Baptist's footsteps as we invite corporate and personal participation in the Prayer of Confession early in our worship liturgy. We know, as did John the Baptist, that confession is good for the soul! We know, as did John the Baptist, that confession levels the playing field with an acknowledgment that all have messed up and are in need of God's forgiveness.

Along with spiritually preparing the way for Jesus, John also proclaimed the coming of Christ. *"The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."*

As Christ followers we share the same calling as John the Baptist. Our role is to prepare the way for Jesus Christ who is the one who creates new life in our families, vocations, neighborhoods, church, school, community and world. Like John the Baptist we are not able to accomplish this personal and cultural transformation but we can prepare the way for Jesus who brings the grace, forgiveness, hope, and courage which gifts new life through the power of God's Holy Spirit.

This morning we have ordained and installed leaders in our church. This is a new beginning for each Elder, Deacon and Trustee as they have been chosen by the people of Fairmont to lead and serve. I pray their service will be inspirational and life-giving as they witness God's Spirit working through them for the growth and blessing of our members. I pray each will have an open heart, mind and spirit that will keep them anticipating God's next work of creation in them and through them. I pray they will grow in their love for Christ, the Church, and the mission God has called them to. I pray that God's Spirit will set them free from the *eight last words of the church.... "we have never done it that way before."* And I pray that God's Spirit will inspire them to embrace the seventeen life-giving words *"what is God up to now and how can we get on board with God's new creation?"* I pray that as these newly installed officers serve they will have the time of their lives and they will live into their calling to *"seek to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, love their neighbors, and work for the reconciliation of the world."*

But the fact that our congregation has elected these officers and we have now installed them does not give the rest of us permission to wash our hands of God's call to ministry. These officers are consecrated for a particular calling as Elders, Deacons and Trustees but we are all called to prepare the way of the Lord right here at Fairmont and in the world. It might be the ministry of prayer, hospitality, visitation, teaching, greeting, ushering, singing, supplying food to the South Dayton Food Pantry, serving the homeless at the House of Bread, helping with a Blood Mobile. Please do not assume that *only* those who are on staff and those who are elected are called to be in ministry. There is a niche of ministry for everyone! While this Sunday is a new beginning for these newly installed officers, it can also be a new beginning Sunday for you each of us. In fact every day can be a new beginning day for us!

The day of Jesus' baptism was a day of new beginnings for him and following his baptism we read that the heaven's opened and the Spirit descended upon Jesus in the form of dove and a voice from heaven proclaimed, "***This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased.***" There is no doubt in my mind that God's baptismal confirmation of Jesus gave him courage to face the severe trials he would be called upon to endure. I can picture Jesus hearkening back to those words of affirmation, "***This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased.***"

As Jesus waded into the River Jordan and was baptized by John, he also sent a love letter to you and me declaring that he is willing to "walk in our shoes!" Jesus' baptism was a visual confirmation of Emmanuel.... "*God with us!*" God with us in our humanity....God with us in our hopes....God with us when things are going well....God with us when our lives are messed up.....*God With Us.....Always!* That's the message of Jesus' baptism!

It is *God with us* who gives these newly installed officers and all the people of Fairmont the confidence that our service will truly make a difference within and outside the walls for our church. It is *God with us* who gives us the confidence to face whatever comes our way with the faith that God looks upon us and says, "***You are my beloved with whom I am well pleased.***"

Amen