

NEW BEGINNINGS

(Luke 5.17-25 and Revelation 21.1-5)

Collect for Friday morning's prayer and inspiration: *Almighty God in Christ you make all things new; transform the poverty of nature by the riches of your grace, and in the renewal of our lives make known your heavenly glory; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord.*

Our theme this morning is New Beginnings, which speaks to me of all that is good about the grace of God, and for our life experiences it is something to be eagerly anticipated as we walk by faith with Jesus. One other thought I have is that new beginnings can be very exciting and lead to unpredictability which can be such a joy. You may have heard this story.

After thirty years spent watching television, the husband told his wife: – Let us now do something really exciting. These words brought to her mind pictures of a car ride through the night city. – Excellent! – She exclaimed. – What will we do? – Well, my love, I thought... Let's exchange chairs.

How exciting is that?

In our gospel reading our hearts and minds heard of that day when the Lord Jesus was teaching a wide congregation with particular needs. To help us see the people in the room I want to use the colours found in traffic lights RED AMBER GREEN. So for Red we see the religious indifferent who had poured in from all over the place, they are standing red faced and concerned. Amber are the religious inquisitives, like Nicodemus who met with Jesus to talk; we can call them the amber lights because with Jesus and the Kingdom of God they don't know whether to Stop or Go with him. Finally in the room we see a group that we will call the eager followers who are young and green, and for some reason they are smiling like people resting on holiday.

Then we have a group of exhausted people cold and pale with concerns and burdens. Amongst them are four friends carrying a lame man who is seriously ill. I wonder when we look at this gathering do we see ourselves in one of these groups, and in proposing this thought, where do you find yourself? Are you in the GREENS and encountering New Beginnings, or standing with the RED and AMBER? Are you pale through a winter of your troubles and discontent?

I want us to consider where we are in relation to the blessings of Jesus in the Kingdom of God.

1. Encountering Jesus in the room of new beginnings
2. The effects of grace on broken lives
3. Standing in the immediate changes

1. Encountering Jesus in the Room of New Beginnings

In our bible reading we read the phrase *that the power of the Lord was present for Jesus to heal the sick.*

I want to merge that verse with what Luke writes in Acts 10:38 *God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power and he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.*

My heart tells me that to encounter New Beginnings I first need to meet with Jesus. This is what was happening with people breaking away from the old and traditional paths they had trod. Jesus was present to make all things new but if you weren't there to see him, you probably missed out on the most important encounter of your whole life.

One writer said; *"every beginning is a consequence every beginning ends something"*. When Jesus was present in power there was the end of something that gripped people and the beginning of something new. So to be in a room with Jesus was a wonderful experience and opportunity which is truly accessible today as we raise our gaze heavenward.

So what of the story of the Lame man? We can never forget the earnestness of his friends. My feeling is that these friends had encountered Jesus in a room and were green with God's love and grace and in life they were already enjoying New Life in Christ. For me this was characterised in that one phrase; *they tried to take the paralysed man lying on his mat into the house to lay him before Jesus.*

The word TRIED in this context has something to teach us about living in the room of New Beginnings. I wonder; what does it say to you?

Trying implies a determined effort, it implies a willing spirit, and it implies involvement in an event or an encounter. In this instance we see that they face the obstacles of getting into a room with Jesus and so they tried another way. They found one possibility; they carry their broken friend up the outer stairs of the house and onto the roof terrace and break into the build through the roof tiles. They then lower the broken man before Jesus for the simple reason that he might encounter the power of God for himself. Their trying was essential to all that happened next.

Jesus meets this man's faith with a power encounter and says *"Friend, your sins are forgiven."*

And I wonder when he said this was Jesus speaking with a gift of Knowledge or wisdom reflecting on the life of King David: Psalm 32. *Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit. When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. I said "I will confess my transgression to the Lord"- and you forgive the guilt of my sin.*

New beginnings in God start with an awareness of our old way of life and what sin does to us. Then as we come out of silence to confess our sins we are truly blessed by his grace and forgiveness and the healing that we so desperately need.

2. The Effects of Grace on Broken Lives

I wonder if this man lying on his mat, totally crippled was lying in the place of being an Obstinate RED, who in reality had enjoyed a good past but some sinful event had occurred that had injured him and left him LOW. When he is placed before Jesus he is not upright and full of fury but a man who is crawling on the ground and humbled by his condition. Jesus saw the man's need for a healing on the inside, it wasn't just his body that was broken and failing him it was his lost soul and a broken heart. Forgiveness Is the Cure. When Jesus said *"Friend your sins are forgiven"* His old sinful red heart was transformed to green. But, it caused the men with red faces to GLOW hot and bright. But in that house on that day people were able to see for themselves that the Forgiveness of Jesus, God's Only Begotten Son, was filled with power and affected for good all the brokenness in the room. Is it possible that some of the indifferent changed, that the red and amber people changed to green and became NEW BEGINNERS? Is it possible that those who had entrenched ideas about God were transformed to faith in Christ? Is it possible that the faint hearted were now truly convinced?

I am reading a book called the way of transition which talks about how life brings to us endpoints, and secondly, periods of being in a neutral zone and thirdly new beginnings. The author states that "Change can happen at any time, but transition comes along when one chapter of your life is over and another is waiting in the wings to make its entrance".

The Grace of God always takes us into new beginnings.

I know what it is like to encounter new beginnings: When I received Jesus as a 12 year old, his Grace and Love poured in as I asked him to forgive my sins. My bruised

heart was healed, and my asthmatic undernourished body was defeated. The affects on me were tears of regret because in that year I had started to lose faith in Jesus and was growing yellow becoming neutral, but then tears of joy came from deep and I realised I was born again and Jesus was overwhelming and now I had a new beginnings to thank God for. So what did I do with all of this? I had to stand up.

3. Standing in the Immediate Changes

Jesus said to the paralysed man "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home". Immediately he stood up in front of them and took what he had been lying on and went home praising God.

Let me tell you that life lying on that mat was now over, it offered no comfort for him any longer, it was no longer a place to hide and suffer. It was time to let it go and to be separated from the mat and a time to be walking in the power of God in the name of Jesus. It was a time to look heavenward for a God who can make all things new.

So, as we finish and come to conclusion when faced with room of new beginnings, Where do you stand in that room? Are you holding to Red or Amber or Green experiences of faith in God? Or are you feeling low and pale with the concerns you have for your health and the needs of others? Jesus is here by his Spirit and his goal is to bring to us new beginnings no matter what life may bring our way; *for "the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases his mercy never comes to an end. They are NEW every morning; great is your faithfulness."* Lam 3.22-23.