

“New Beginnings with God’s Help”

We are just a few weeks removed from the beginning of the New Year, 2018. Some of us rang in the New Year with gatherings, or parties, or a special dinner or perhaps curled up on the couch watching 1 to 2 million people look absolutely frozen in Times Square, NY as the big ball drops at midnight. As we welcomed in the New Year some of us made resolutions. (Many might be broken already). Resolutions are a Lutheran thing. You know, God makes all things New. Resolutions speak to New Beginnings. I noticed my favorite cartoon from the 12/31/17 cartoon section of the Post Crescent. It of course was Peanuts with the lovable Charlie Brown. I believe that Charlie Brown is an ELCA Lutheran; Lucy not so much. Here is their dialogue about New Beginnings:

Charlie has been busy at his desk writing a list which he carries to Lucy. “You’re going to be proud of me Lucy... I’ve decided that this next year is going to be my year of decision! This is a list of things in my life that I’m going to correct...I’m going to be a better person! (With a big smile on his face). Lucy says, “Not me...I’m going to spend this whole year regretting the past...It’s the only way, Charlie Brown. I’m going to cry over spilt milk, and sigh over lost loves...It’s a lot easier...It’s too hard to improve ... I tried it once...it drove me crazy. Forget the future is my motto...regret the past...why did I do this? Why did I do that? I regret it all...Oh what regrets, what remorse! What anguish!” Charlie just sighs as Lucy walks away.

Yes Charlie is an ELCA Lutheran who understands the concept of New Beginnings. God makes all things new.

A reflection on New Beginnings: The time was approximately 7:45 AM. I was returning home from an executive workout at the Y. (Whirlpool and Sauna). My wife, Cathy, called me and said, “you have to call Hays, a plane just crashed into his building, and the building is on fire”. Hays, our son, is a lawyer and at the time was working for a law firm that occupied the 54th and 55th floors of the North Tower of the World Trade Center. With my heart in my hands I pulled into the Piggly Wiggly lot and called his apartment, hoping that he was not yet in the building. (Often he worked all night).

The phone rang ten times - please Lord - then he picked up. "Thank goodness you're OK!" I said. "Why wouldn't I be OK?" he responded. I shared the news of the attack and you know the rest of the story.

In the many years that followed, we visited the Big Apple at least twice a year and usually stayed at the Millennium Hilton right across from the demolished old World Trade Center. On each visit, we watched the progress of a new structure - a taller structure than before - called the Freedom Tower. Just last year we went up to the Observation deck and witnessed firsthand this "new beginning" and God with us moment.

We understand this concept of New Beginnings. The God with us - Emmanuel moments.

We are at a funeral service e- 55 years of marriage- our partner is gone - how do we go on? We pray for New Beginnings and with help from friends and God's grace it happens.

You are in the Pastor's Study- your spouse has left you – three young children - how do you go on? With Pastor's help, and God's grace it happens.

The school just called. Your son has been suspended again. You need New Beginnings desperately. With the help of counselors and God's grace it happens. He makes it.

You have been laid off at work. You had 25 years in and you're only 52. How to start again? With the help of job professionals and a loving wife and children and God's grace it happens. New Beginnings.

You have your own story about God's Grace.

How many of you remember the story about Jesus walking on the water and the big storm. What does Jesus do? *Congregation responses.* All important. Key one - He gets in the boat. He gets in the boat.

That brings me to Our Savior's in beautiful downtown Neenah. Pastor Cath has retired. What now? We have an Interim Pastor whose sermons are hard to understand with his Brooklyn accent. Jesus told us how. He is in our boat with our great staff- with our committed church council, with our engaging church committees. How does newness develop? With God's grace- he gets in our boat.

I stood on the 102nd floor of the new Freedom Tower and looked up and thanked God for that "new beginning". Today I stand in this pulpit and give thanks to God for being in our boat at Our Saviors - leading us to new beginnings.

Amen- Let it Be So.