

A NEW DAY

Lamentations 3:22-23

Newbegun United Methodist Church

May 6, 2018

Rev. Dr. Roger Braun

Because of the power of the resurrection, and the presence of the Holy Spirit, and the promise of God's mercy, then the past way of knowing God has been done away with and a new day has come. In response to our hopelessness and brokenness Jesus came into the world and died on the cross for our sins so through him we may be made new. We don't need to turn over a new leaf, for that leaf is still attached to the old branch. We need a new life that is grafted into our being.

The problem that we run into, at this point, is that the lingering old nature – the bitter root of our old sinful selves is just too stubborn to go away nicely. Many of us, at some point along the way, find themselves asking: If I am a new creation, why am I not acting new? Why am I still living like the old me? Why won't these emotions and feelings disappear? This is a struggle we all face. An author once wrote, "Everyone who serves God will discover sooner or later that the greatest hindrance to their work is not others, but themselves." When a person accepts Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, and the Holy Spirit comes to dwell within you, and God grafts a new life into your spirit – this doesn't mean that this is the end process for you. It represents the beginning as God, over time, conforms you to the image of Jesus. The road that we are on is not a straight upward line. It is more like the stock market with plenty of ups and downs; setbacks and victories; good stock choices and bad stock choices. We know

what we want to be: holy, good, and like Christ Jesus. And we know what we don't want to be: sinful, selfish; disobedient. But leaving that old person behind isn't easy. What can we do to nurture our new life and make it permanent?

Put this thought into your heart: Your relationship with God is based solely upon mercy, and always will be. Scripture tells us in the Letter to Titus, "God saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy. (3:5)

In business finance, do you know the difference between chapter 11 and chapter 7? Chapter 11 is a temporary financial reorganization that keeps a company's creditors at bay until it can get back on its feet financially. Chapter 7 is a total and complete erasure of all debts, with no further requirement to repay. This nearly always leads to the dissolution of the company. Becoming a Christian is a chapter 7 experience – all debts to God are cancelled, the old is dissolved, the new arises out of the ashes. But many believers treat it as a chapter 11 experience. They think of it as a temporary reorganization of the mess we made of our lives until we can once again manage on our own. (Which isn't true in the first place.) So we didn't replace the old with the new, we just gave the old nature a temporary face-lift. That is not the way it works. We are saved by God's grace and mercy and we live by God's grace and mercy. We will never get to a point where we don't need God's grace and mercy. It will forever be our lifeline. In God's words in Lamentations it reads, "God's mercies will never end; they are new every morning." That is something to rejoice in and be humbled by, for each morning we need new mercies. Praise be to God for that. Your relationship with God is always about God's mercy. We will never get past the need for God's grace. A soul intent on becoming a new creature will nurture that truth.

Another way to know that you are nurturing your new self is that you will learn to despair of your sin before you have the power to defeat your sin. Sin knows how to do only one thing and sin can only accomplish one thing – it only knows how to destroy. It never lets up and it never ends well. No one has ever said, “When I began abusing alcohol – that’s when all the pieces of my life came together.” No one has ever said, “When I began backbiting and criticizing and gossiping about my friends, that’s when my relationship began to flourish.” No one has ever said, “When I began to betray my spouse and neglect my family and live only for myself, we were suddenly happier than we’ve ever been before.” This is true about every sin – the big ones that are visible and the small ones we try to hide. Sin never makes a situation better. It only knows how to destroy. The sooner a person comes to that acknowledgement, the sooner a person is on the way to victory. The person who says, I am forgiven; so I can remain the same and I’ll be right with God,” is headed for trouble. However, the person who can say “Because of God’s grace I sin MORE than I want,” is on the road to recovery and victory.

It’s about being aware of sin and letting the Holy Spirit guide you to something better. It’s like this: during the course of this year’s March madness basketball tournaments people were shocked that so many last place teams beat the first place teams. Do the losing coaches just shrug it off and say, better luck next year? Not if they want to keep their job. No, for the rest of the year the coaches will find and fix their mistakes for the next time. They don’t stop playing because they lost and they don’t ignore it either. That is the kind of nurturing we do with our spirits when we struggle with temptations and sin. We say: This is not what I want to define my life in Christ. I

am going to try to live in the new creation in Christ and do it again and again until I get it right. We are aware of our struggle, despair of our sin, and let the Holy Spirit help.

A third way we nurture our new life in Christ is to realize that your new life in Christ begins again every single day. Again, in Lamentations we read, “The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.” (22-23) Do you hear that? God’s mercies never end. God’s love never fails; God’s faithfulness never ceases. No matter what happened yesterday, today his mercies are brand new; and you can start again.

A while back I was talking with a colleague and he was feeling discouraged because he hadn’t been able to establish a lasting change in his life. He kept making short-term, temporary changes, like a New Year’s resolution, but none of them would stick. During our conversation I realized something – lasting change really lasts only a day, and then you’ve got to do it again. Living one day at a time is not just a catchy phrase; it is the only way one can live in the first place. And here is the Good News, God agrees. In essence God has promised that every new day we can begin right with God and we can count on God’s mercy and grace forever. We can experience a new day in our lives and a new day to become a new creature in Christ. Thank you, God, for this new day and the new creation we are becoming. Amen.