

Beginnings
[Genesis 1:1-5](#), [Mark 1:4-11](#)

Around this time of year, we may go through a process of reflection. Some of us assess the year that has passed and we look toward the future with both short and long term goals. Often folks make New Year's resolutions, which may or may not pan out for the long term. What are some of the more popular resolutions you have made or heard? Perhaps it has something to do with spending more time with family, losing weight (which incidentally is the number one resolution for many years running), or starting or devoting more time to a hobby. Rarely do you hear of anyone who resolves to become a workaholic or chooses to gain as much weight as possible (I said rarely, so if you are looking to become Mr. Universe you may need to bulk up).

The New Year represents beginnings; the start of something new.

Our scripture in Genesis is probably familiar to most of us. The first five verses are action-packed. In general, you see God creating order out of chaos, and order is seen as a good thing. Each time God created something to ease the chaos, God saw it was good. The beginning of the Bible depicts the beginning of our very existence. We were created for the purpose of being in relationship with God. God wants to be a part of our lives. Yet at times we may draw away from God, often drawing away from order back toward chaos.

I have talked about the chaos that can sometimes exist in my home. I like the idea of housecleaning to a point where you can see your progress. As you go from room to room, you can see the path plowed through chaos to create

some sense of order. Things may not be perfect – and heaven help anyone who opens my junk drawer! When the job is done, I can look around and for a brief instant experience a physical peace that comes from order. THEN THE KIDS COME HOME! What is it about order that seems to bring on a sense of calm? It appears order is the natural state of things and chaos is the unnatural state.

This month marks the half-year point for us. It is hard to believe that we have already been together for 6 months. It seems that time has been filled with activity, filled with purpose. It feels as though we are in harmony with God. My teacher, Rev. Glen Cannon, who came to visit us last month, sent an e-mail stating how much he and his wife enjoyed their visit. He said, “It is always a blessing to see a good fit.” I think it is a good fit – God is using us together

as we rekindle our relationship with God and with our community.

A part of me would like to just sit back and revel in the successes we have had so far – let’s face it, Christmas was awesome! The kids did a wonderful job with their presentation that brought out a terrific message. I still can’t get over the Grinch on the front lawn! But I have learned an important lesson from Rev. Dennis Yocum of Calvary UMC. We need to keep pushing forward and looking toward our next goal – to continue to weave chaos into order. Our question should always be, “What’s next?”

I think Jesus may have felt a bit of that spirit at the event of his baptism as noted in our gospel lesson. This event is depicted in all three of the synoptic gospels. In Matthew’s account, chapter 3:14, Matthew notes that John was reluctant to baptize Jesus. He says, “I am the one who

needs to be baptized by you.” But Jesus reassured John that this needed to be done and so John performs the baptism. In all the accounts of this event, the heavens opened and the Holy Spirit descended, marking the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry on earth. Perhaps Jesus also would have liked to sit back and revel in the moment – God had recognized God’s son and proclaimed Jesus as Lord. I’m sure this would have been a truly awesome sight to behold. Imagine hearing the audible voice of God and seeing the Holy Spirit descend in a manner we could recognize. There would be no doubt that Jesus was sent for a special purpose – to serve as sacrifice for sin and be the savior of the world. So Jesus also continues to look forward to ‘What’s next?’ He acknowledges the moment and moves on to the next task, which for Jesus ended up being a 40-day trial in the wilderness.

So at the start of a new year, we too acknowledge the moment. Some of us look back at 2008 and may think, 'good riddance'. We've seen our economy slide drastically to the point where many have lost thousands in property value and mutual fund and stock declines. The real estate market continues to fall with foreclosures and unemployment rates hitting record highs. Consumers are actually being blamed for the recession because we are not spending enough money, yet how can we when some of us cannot be sure if we will be able to meet basic needs from month to month.

Yet through all the difficulties, there have been some highlights. Gas is no longer \$4/gallon. While we have weathered the economic crunch, our church has been able to meet all of its financial obligations. We are seeing a renewing of our faith through good works as we continue to

partner with our community and reach out with a hand of mercy. On a personal note, I began a path to ministry and for the first time in my sordid career path, I feel I am finally on the right track. We are a good match, as we have set our rudder and are moving on to 'What's next?' We acknowledge our starting point together and we are moving forward to continue to share God's love with our community.

So what is next? Where do we go from here? We are planning activities to keep the momentum going, and we are always, always checking our compass to make sure we are aligned with God's ultimate plan for us. We are kicking around some ideas for a Valentine's dinner, a Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper, an Ash Wednesday service, a Lenten Bible study on the book of Mark, and a complete set of Holy Week services beginning with a

Maundy Thursday family meal and service, a Good Friday service, and possibly two services on Easter including a Sunrise service. Granted many of these are in the planning phase, so keep looking for updates on our website and in the bulletins (we'll try not to kill too many trees!) There continue to be opportunities for spiritual growth as well as financial planning, healthy living, fitness and addiction services offered through Calvary UMC. We are small and mighty and we are not slowing down for a second. The field is ripe for harvest and the workers are few. We have said 'yes' to God and we don't take promises lightly or for granted. This is only the beginning! Amen.