

John 1:1-18

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'") From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.*

In the Beginning - January 2, 2022

John 1:1-18

Well, Happy New Year! We begin 2022 in hope as we begin all new years in hope, don't we? I mean, what is so special about January 1, anyway? It is just an arbitrary point in time, after all. We had sunrise and sunset on that day, just as we did the day before, just as we did today, and just as we will tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow. The idea of New Year's Day is a human invention, acknowledging that in over the course of 365 spins of the Earth, our planet has traveled around the Sun yet another time, just as it has been doing for thousands, millions, and billions of years.

Nonetheless, we are at that time-honored place in our journey where we arbitrarily state that we have reached a kind of finish line in the sky and can therefore start over again.

And that's a good thing, starting over again, isn't it? All of us human beings face the need to start over again from time to time, don't we? Whether it is in our relationships, or our jobs, or our health, or so many other aspects of our lives, the belief that we can start over again brings us a certain amount of comfort.

Of course, there is no such thing as completely making a break with the past. We are all enmeshed with everything that has happened to us in the past. We will always be influenced, for better and for worse, by our experiences and our knowledge that stretch back over the years. We can never completely escape what has happened before.

Nonetheless, we do have the ability, as symbolized by the New Year, to imagine a different future. That is why human beings of all cultures have created a time of celebration called the New Year. It so happens that in many countries of the world, January 1 is considered the first day of the new year. But we know our Jewish friends have their own commemoration of their new year, as do our Chinese Friends, as well as those of other nations and religions. In short, human beings know that we all need to reboot our lives and New Year's is a great excuse to do it.

It is therefore both uncannily and totally appropriate that our Gospel Scripture comes from John this morning and starts with the words, "In the beginning." I hope those three words sound familiar to you because John deliberately chose those three words to mirror the first three words of the first book of the Bible, Genesis. Genesis begins, chapter 1, verse 1, with the words, "In the beginning" and continues, "when God created the Heavens and the Earth." Genesis is not just talking about a beginning, or a new beginning, like we do every January 1. No, Genesis is talking about the first beginning, the beginning of everything. The beginning of God creating galaxies, stars, planets, plants,

animals, and yes, you and me. Look around, all we see, hear, and experience came from somewhere and people of faith of all religions attribute all this to God — whatever you believe God to be.

So here we are on this January 1, celebrating beginnings once again and for Christians the idea of new beginnings is incredibly important. In fact, our ability to begin and begin again, is at the heart of what our faith is all about.

As we start this year, the idea of beginnings operates not just at one, but three levels. First, there is the idea of beginnings as announced in Genesis: God began the world. Second there is the idea of beginnings as announced by John: in Jesus Christ, God entered the world personally and became part of it, giving humanity a new kind of beginning. Finally, there is the idea of beginning partially represented by the New Year, but best represented at this table of grace and love we see before us this morning. Yes, in church we all have the opportunity to begin again, getting a re-do for whatever has happened in our lives. In faith, we can each of us begin again at any time because our God is a God of beginnings.

Let's examine more closely the idea of God as our creator, creator of everything.

A question that I expect crosses every person's mind at some point is where did all of this come from? How does everything I see around me work? We look at our bodies and I hope when you look at yourself in the mirror you are amazed, you are in awe. I don't use the word "awe" lightly, but every living creature and especially the ones we call human beings are truly, incredibly awesome. Just think for a moment what our bodies are doing at the very second. We are breathing. Our lungs are expanding and contracting, taking in air and somehow processing the oxygen in the air to replenish the red blood cells which are busy moving through literally miles of arteries, veins, and capillaries. The movement of our blood is powered by our beating hearts, pushing the deoxygenated blood to our lungs and pumping the re-oxygenated blood back into our bodies to nourish our cells and keep us living. At the same time, our stomachs are digesting food. Our livers are chemical laboratories which never stop, continuously adjusting the chemistry of our bodies so everything works. Our brains are processing thousands of signals at once, almost all of which we consciously know nothing about.

All these activities happen — happen as the result of two cells, two barely visible cells uniting and dividing and dividing relentlessly. From these two cells all our organs formed and the bones giving us structure and the skin covering all that and our brains which attempt to make sense of it all.

We should look in the mirror every day of our lives and simply stare at how magnificent our amazing bodies truly are. And if our bodies are so amazing, how incredible that this world, this universe in

which we are alive, all of it works in harmony to enable us to live and breathe and grow. How is it that we are brimming with all kinds of chemicals, the elements of which originated in exploding stars! We are indeed made of dust, interstellar dust which has been floating around the cosmos for billions of years until it ended up on this little speck of rock we call Earth.

If all this is purely random, how many tries, how many failures were there before this combination, this fortuitous combination happened? We have a choice. We can believe we are the result of utterly random collisions occurring over quadrillions of years or we are, and everything around us is, deliberately and purposefully created. Created by God.

What of this God? Yes, many think or are comfortable with the idea that God did create everything — writing the rules for how the game is to be played, in other words. But then, to many, God walked away from creation and said, "Good Luck." However, the Advent of Jesus Christ shows that God did not walk away from creation but instead got even more involved with it. God became a human being and experienced life as one of us. How attached to creation can you get?

Indeed, this is where most human beings get stuck. Sure there is a God, but how involved is this God with creation? When we speak of beginnings, we imply that there is continuation. The first chapter of Genesis makes it clear: God created everything with the intention that it keep going. The Sun and Moon rise and set. Oceans move and harbor life. Plants, grow, are harvested, and die. Animals of all sizes run non stop. And supervising all this action, all this life, are we human beings. God intends for us to keep creation going.

It seems strange that a creator would make something as elaborate as all this and simply walk away. Of course, if God has walked away from creation leaving us to carry on, then we are only responsible to ourselves, aren't we? Our mission is to hold ourselves accountable for caring for this creation we have been given — or we can be irresponsible and living only for the moment, extracting whatever we can for the here and now and frankly ignoring what comes after. Humans always choose the latter.

Is God still here? Does God care whether we take care of creation or mess it up? If you believe there is a God, then why wouldn't God care about creation? All religions all over the world are human attempts to understand the mind of God and what God wants for creation. Every book, every ritual, every holiday, every sacrifice we humans make is intended to help us get closer to God and understanding God's will. Our Bible, therefore, is a book written by human beings which tries with stories, poetry, history, and lists of rules how God wants creation to work. For us the question is whether the Bible was just written by a bunch of guys sitting around with nothing better to do or

whether somehow God was able to help the writers understand God's plan in ways we cannot quite understand. Most of what we call the Old Testament is God indirectly teaching and influencing us.

In Jesus Christ, God goes beyond influencing human beings indirectly. Instead, God shows up in person. That is why John's gospel starts with the words, "In the beginning." Jesus is a new kind of beginning because Jesus is God showing us in person how we should treat each other. If you want to know what God is like and how God intends creation to work, look no further than Jesus. We should learn from his teachings. We should live as he lived. We should love as he loved. And frankly, whether you believe in God or not, can you point to a better example of how to live a human life — a way that spans all generations — than Jesus Christ did? No one, no one, no one, has lived a human life better than Jesus did. If you disagree, I challenge you to find that person and follow him or her.

Aha! But Jesus died and ascended into heaven. Surely at that point God stopped God's involvement with creation, right? Once again, you might say that God abandoned creation. No Jesus, no example to follow. We're back on our own. God outside of us. Jesus outside of us. Full of good ideas perhaps, but really hard to believe, let alone follow.

Look, friends, look at this table. This table changes everything. This table is the ultimate in new beginnings. This table turns our lives upside down!

Hear the good news! God has never stopped being involved with creation up to this very minute. Because God is always involved with us, beginnings and new beginnings are always possible. What are we about to do here? Jesus told us, "This is my body, broken for you." "This is my blood shed for you." And what do we do with Jesus' body and the blood? We eat them. We drink them. These elements go inside of us and become part of our own bodies! Every time we take communion, we are reminding ourselves that God is not just out there. Jesus is not just showing us how to live. No, God in Jesus Christ is inside of us, part of us, united with us. Jesus' body is united with our own.

When we visit this table, we begin again. We begin, filled with the presence of God, filled with the love of Christ, filled with the ability to go into the world and live!

Today, friends, today, we are nourished by our creator to begin once more so that we can live as God wants us to! We can love as Jesus has taught us! We can speak and act and just plain be human in ways that make this world and make ourselves all that God wants us to be.

My friends, on this day of beginnings, begin by filling yourself with God and truly coming to life!

I say these words in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.