

“To Begin Again”

Jeremiah 31:7-14; Ephesians 1:3-14; John 1:1-18

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From the Pulpit

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A communion meditation delivered by The Rev. Dr. Timothy C. Ahrens, Senior Minister, The First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, Christmas II, January 3, 2016, dedicated to the memory of Rebekah Salser Hambor and to her family especially her husband, sons, and Paul Flocken and Arlene Reynolds – her uncle and grandmother – and always to the glory of God!

“To Begin Again”

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Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of each one of our hearts be acceptable in your sight O Lord, our rock and our salvation. Amen.

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Somewhere in the stillness of time and silence, a Word was spoken. Breath was given. Spirit was given. Life came into being. But, not just A Word broke the stillness of time and silence, THE Word was delivered. Like a newborn crying out in the Universe, The Word came into being “in the beginning.”

And The Word took shape and form and came into being WITH God at the beginning of time. And here our story begins, too. This is our story. This is our song. It is a story and a song with a spirit that runs under the rocks of time. This is our story and our song. In our story, The Word gives shape and form to all creation. And when the time is right, This Word becomes “fleshed out” in human form.

We should never be surprised by this Word’s birth in Bethlehem or this Word’s healing in Galilee or this Word’s Resurrection from the dead, because, this Word cannot be silenced or stopped from doing the miraculous or stopped from rising from the dead. This Word calls all the other words in all times and places to listen. This Word is the first Word and the last Word. This Word is God speaking, God being, God doing, God everywhere and in all things. This Word is God with “Flesh on.”

The Word is not just a great baby to whom we sing songs of adoration and praise, or a great teacher who graces all our days, or a great prophet who calls us to change all our ways, or a great healer who binds up and mends all our broken ways, or a great guy who shows up for our dinner parties and plays. He is not just a great storyteller who weaves parables for the ages, or a great fisherman who walks

on water to prove he can catch the big fish, or a great rabbi who can read Torah better than anyone else. In fact, he is not JUST the Reason for the Season. He is the heartbeat of the Universe. He is the reason for everything, everywhere and for all time. He is Promise being born each day.

He is “God with skin on.” He is the ONE whom God has “fleshed out” for the purpose of showing us why and how to live our lives. He is the Light. He is the Bread of Life – in fact - He is Life itself. He is the Spirit. He is the Truth. He is the Love. He is The Word. And when he breathes or speaks or laughs or prays or walks – God is Alive. And our “Alive God” is still breathing, speaking, laughing, praying, walking, doing. “God with Skin” on has been about this Way since the creation of the world – not just since the Nativity on a winter night 2000 years ago.

So, listen to The Word. Feel The Word. Sense The Word. Like water, let The Word soak into your skin, like music and poetry, let The Word enter your trembling heart. Like a good book and good thought, let The Word enter your mind and your consciousness. Allow The Word to touch you, shape you, move you, define you and call you to be fully alive – now and throughout eternity.

At the beginning of time, when God’s Word was “fleshed out” and the Life-Light blazed out of the darkness

and the darkness couldn't put it out, and the Word became "the real thing," everything changed. When he was born and named Jesus, The Word moved into the neighborhood of humanity. Some of the neighbors didn't know what to do with him. He was too lively, too bright, too active, too loving. He was too smart, too kind, too compassionate and too "full of God." Some looked at him and mistook his "too-full-of-God-ness" for "too full of himself-ness." But, it was never about him. This Word who moved into the neighborhood was always pointing to God. He was always pulling and pushing to God. He didn't like people talking about him in ways that drew them to him. He was all about God – 24/7. Even when he rested on the Sabbath – his eyes were watching God.

Our Light of the World made God as "plain as day" to those who were listening and watching God with him. These are the folks who "Got him." They understood him. For those who understood him, he became their Love and their Life-Light. For those who didn't "get him" – his light, and life, and love were threatening. The "didn't get him" folks were more rolled-up in their old words and old ways and couldn't open up to read the truth of The Word right before their very eyes.

The Word had many words. This Word of God-man told people to “Fear not.” Fear is the great companion of the poor and misbegotten. Fear is breathless humidity. It clings like dampness and cold to the air. It crushes days and nights with dampness. Unrestrained by order of the mind or heart, fear will destroy all in its path. Even though The Word himself was under constant threat from conception to death to resurrection, he never feared. “Fear not” were not just words, but his very way. He banished all fears but one – Fear of God. In other words, LOVE God so completely you fear only the thought of losing God in your life. That is what fear God means. Only that. So, perfect love casts out fear. He said, “Fear not.”

He said, “Be Genuine.” Let your “Yes be Yes” and your “no be no.” All else obscures the Truth – which leads humanity to deny the Eternal. He calls us still to be genuine. Let your motives be simple. Don’t let deception hold your heart or mind. Be real. Don’t be anyone but yourself. Just be genuine.

He said, “Love” – don’t hate - just Love. Howard Thurman writes in his poem, “The Great Incarnate Words”- *“Hate is the last great fortress of the weak. The moving currents of resentment flow through the channels of the heart, when overarching wrong inflicts its bitter lash. But this*

may pass.” (Howard Thurman, The Mood of Christmas, pp.117). Don't yield to hate – or its first cousins - resentment and bitterness. In hate, the world grows dark and darkness loves the fear that is created in loveless abyss.

Rather, the Word calls us to Love. Not just to love a little – but “To love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength. To love your neighbor as yourself.” Love God – okay! But, who is my neighbor? He tells us that our neighbor is the man or woman whose need of you lays claim – friend and foe alike. This is so hard. But, it is fearless and it is genuine and it is good. Its source is God. It can be trusted as true.

Today, as we begin again, let us begin in the beginning. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word WAS God. All things came into being through him and without him not one thing came into being.” Without Him, we are nothing. With Him, all light and love; all glory and majesty; all grace and truth come into being. He is our story. He is our song.

So, let us join together at God's table of grace and truth and start at the beginning. So be it.

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