

January 7, 2018

Sermon: Carol-Ann Chapman, Nobleton/Schomberg United Church

A New Day

Focus:

Genesis 1:1-5 (NRSV)

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

Mark 1:4-11 (NRSV)

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

The Baptism of Jesus

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased."

Sermon: It's a New Day

With the quilt pulled up close to her chin, Jen rolled over, and looked toward the window...it was still dark outside. Yesterday had been a difficult day. After years of writing a fiction novel, something that she had always hoped to do, she had received 3 letters of rejection in one day. She wondered if she would ever be a published author. She had studied literature in school, and finished a degree in Journalism...writing is all she ever wanted to do...Light started to peak over the window sill. She sat up on the side of her bed and placed her bare feet on the cold wooden floor; she walked over and pulled the drapes open. As she looked out the window, she could see rays of the new day's sun peeking through leafless trees. She took a deep breath, time to get dressed...it was a new day...she wondered what was in store for her.

It is a new day:

God said "let there be light" and God separated the light from the darkness. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day. There was evening and then there was morning. It's funny how we usually think of a day beginning with the light of the morning and ending with the darkness of night...but in the beginning the earth was a formless void covered in darkness. First there was darkness then there was light. What if we are to think of a new day as beginning with darkness only to have the morning light shine upon it? A new day beginning with emptiness of the night only to come alive with the light of daytime.

On that first day, the one we read about in Genesis, it is a day that would be one of many to come. A day that would bring a covenant with Abraham...a day that would bring a covenant with Noah. And for forty years there were new days of

Moses bringing God's enslaved people through the wilderness. There were days of Kings, there were days of Prophets...and as we are taught, a day finally came when the promised Messiah was born. The one that we celebrated only 2 weeks ago...the day we call Christmas.

The Christmas season as we know it in our culture, is over. For most of the Christmas Season we kept the colourful lights shining on our house. They were so bright and pretty that when the day came that we no longer turned them on I felt a little sad...it meant that it was the end of a special time in my life... a time for family and friends; a time to give and share. But before Christmas, for us really to appreciate the lights that shone so brightly there need to be a time of darkness. Perhaps now is when the new day really begins...not when the lights are shining but when they are not. The lights no longer shine, yet the new day begins.

The New Year for many can be about resolutions...often these resolutions are about trying to improve ourselves. We may choose to eat better, exercise more, drink less alcohol. The thoughts of what we need to do can be daunting. It can be like walking in a dark alley, just feeling your way and hoping you will get where you are going. But it can be the beginning of something new.

In the beginning there was darkness and God shone light onto the day...and with each sunrise we are given the light of a new day. Each time we experience the darkness of night or the darkness of life we have the hope of a new day that will shine.

When Jesus was baptized by John, this is when the light really began to shine upon him. Most likely he had been working as a craftsman, perhaps travelling to the local city to find work. He took care of the mundane tasks of life. It wasn't

until he heard the words, "This is my son with whom I am well pleased" that the light shone upon him. This was when he started his ministry; this was the light on a rather stagnant existence. This was the light of His day.

The time leading up to his baptism and his subsequent teaching and ministry was just one time, just one day. The light of the day shone on Jesus when he was blessed with God's spirit and that light continued to shine on the world through his work and ministry. What was to come was another period of darkness, the beginning of a new day that brought his torture and death. But like all days it did not end in darkness but in the light of the resurrection. A light that brought the hope of everlasting life to all. The darkness of Jesus' death was not the end, it was the darkness that allowed his life to shine in eternity.

Christmas is over and we start a new day. A day where there is work and time before the lights of Christmas will shine on us again. Whatever it is you face this New Year, no matter how dark things may seem at times...there is hope for something new, there is hope for the days light to shine, because the darkness is always followed by light.

And while we live in this perpetual day that is filled with darkness and light we can look to the New Year as a time when we can examine our lives, find the courage to improve them and find ways that we can make our light shine for others.

Perhaps this year can be one where you will work on having a more positive attitude and be intentional about shining kindness on those you encounter.

Perhaps you can begin each day by thinking about what is good in your life. I came across an idea where you take a jar like this (mason jar) and each day you write

about one good thing. No matter how dark life may seem sometimes we all have something good that we can be thankful for. Whether it is a smile from a stranger, clean water, a home, food...friends...each one of us has something. At the end of the year you can pull out what you had written and remember all of the goodness that has been in your life throughout the year.

Maybe this will be the year when you look for ways to grow in your faith. Be it through commitment to the church, or by learning to understand your faith better through an upcoming Lenten study or by choosing to begin each day on a word of prayer. There are many ways to grow in faith, my hope is that through this year I can shine upon you ways to do this, ways that are meaningful and inclusive of all, ways that meet you wherever you are on your walk of faith.

Jen, the writer, the hope to be author, picked up a book from her bedside table. The corners were worn from much use. On the front she read, "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button, by F. Scott Fitzgerald." Her father had given it to her when she had started university. She opened it up and looked at the handwritten note on the inside jacket and read.

For what it's worth...it's never too late, or in my case too early, to be whoever you want to be. There's no time limit. Start whenever you want. You can change or stay the same. There are no rules to this thing. We can make the best or the worst of it. I hope you make the best of it. I hope you see things that startle you. I hope you feel things that you never felt before. I hope you meet people who have a different point of view. I hope you live

a life you're proud of, and if you're not, I hope you have the courage to start all over again.¹

The quote had not come from the book, but from the screen-play based on the book. It was one she had read over and over. Each time she was feeling the darkness of her life this helped to give her the hope of a new day.

Today is a new day. I pray that on this day, that whatever darkness you may be experiencing in your life, that you will live in the hope of the light... and that somehow you find ways to spread that light onto others, so that they too have the hope of the light that is God.

Amen.

¹ Falmouth Public Library, <http://www.falmouthpubliclibrary.org/blog/the-curious-case-of-misquotation/>