

New Beginnings John 1:1-18

Did you know that New Year's Day is the one holiday that is almost universal? It's the world's most observed holiday. Many people use New Year's day to reflect on their lives, and based on that reflection, resolve to do things differently in the coming year.

For those who established a resolution or two that you now feel is too harsh or unattainable, I have some good news: you only have to deal with them until March 2 - then you can give them up for Lent.

Resolutions can be good, especially if we resolve to change bad habits we've established in our lives. One guy dialed his girlfriend and got the following recording: "I'm not available right now, but thanks for caring enough to call. I'm making some changes in my life, and if you got this recording, you're one of the changes."

By and large, it's good to make changes. And as we're so often reminded by those around us, none of us is perfect.

Our text this morning is from the prologue to the Gospel of John and the emphasis is not on our past, but on our future. John encourages us not to focus on our regrets, but on our possibilities. Let me read those opening verses again:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made . . . He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God."

What a positive message for this New Year! It's what we need to hear as we begin 2022, knowing deep in our heart that we can be more tomorrow than we were yesterday because we are children of God. That we can do all things through Christ Jesus who strengthens us. That . . . "all who receive him, who believe in his name, {are} given the right to become children of God."

All of us have unrealized potential. That's the first thing these words say to me. We are children of the dust who have the potential to be children of the Divine. When we were born into this world, our future was ripe with potential.

A young woman used a bicycle to get around campus. She wore a T-shirt and on the front it read, "I'm going to be a doctor." There was also a sign hanging on from the seat of her bicycle which read: "I'm going to be a Mercedes." There was a young woman who understood her potential.

I'm sure you've heard about the Suzuki method of musical instruction. It came to a Japanese man, whose last name is Suzuki, while he was visiting a building that served as a giant incubator for thousands of Japanese songbirds known as larks. The breeders of these larks take thousands of eggs and incubate them in giant, warm, silent halls that act as a gigantic nest.

The only sound that the new hatchlings hear as they break through the shells of their eggs is the sound of a very special adult lark, chosen because of its singing ability. Suzuki noticed that every chick that hatched automatically began to copy the master singer lark.

Even more remarkable, after a few days he noticed that each chick, having started out copying songs, began to develop its own variations on the original Master Song. The breeders wait until the chick musicians have developed their own styles, and then select from them the next Master Singer, and so the process continues.

Suzuki next realized that the same is true of Japanese children as they learn to speak: that any baby, born in any country, automatically learns, within two years, to speak the language of that country. This means that every normal baby's brain is capable of learning many languages."¹

When you think about that a few moments, you realize what an amazing thing that is. Given the proper environment, we are capable of gathering an amazing amount of information and skills in a short amount of time. It's sad that so much of our potential is neglected.

I notice something else our text teaches me. **We have enormous untapped spiritual potential.** Now this may be a concept that many won't easily grasp, but it's one that is vitally important. Our text doesn't say that Christ came into the world so that we can improve our I.Q. or that we'll be able to run a marathon in record time.

It says that whoever receives Christ and believes on his name has the potential to become a child of God. That means that you and I have the potential to be like Christ. That means that you and I have the potential within our hearts and souls for peace, for joy, for hope, for love, for forgiveness - greater than we can possibly imagine.

Try that truth on for size. It means that we no longer have to live lives filled with inner conflict, anger, resentment, fear, hatred, guilt or rejection. By the power of God's Holy Spirit, we can become new people and when that happens it takes on amazing results.

Dr. Tony Evans came to know Jesus because of something that happened to his father. Tony was ten at the time, and his father gathered the family around the kitchen table and told them that he had given his life to Christ.

Now, the back story is that Tony's father was a rough-living longshoreman in Baltimore, Maryland. Tony's dad made liquor in their basement. But, by the grace of God, he found Christ and became a different person.

A few days after giving his life to Christ, he gutted his basement of all his liquor making equipment. Where there had been a lot of conflict and strife in their family, now there was a renewed commitment to love and the bickering between husband and wife quieted down. Through times of Bible study and prayer, the entire family began to grow together. "Before, there was conflict, [now] there was peace," says Evans. "Our family became stable and strong."

As a result of his father's turnaround, Tony Evans eventually found himself following Christ, enrolled in Dallas Theological Seminary, and is today one of our country's best-known pastors.²

Sometimes it happens just that dramatically. Sometimes it happens slowly over time. But it happens because you and I can become more than we were. And that

¹ Michael J. Gleb and Tony Buzan, *Lessons From the Art of Juggling* (New York: Harmony Books, 1992).

² Stephen Arterburn, *Flash Points* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2002), p. 92.

transformation doesn't depend on our background, our physical limitations or our mental abilities. Nor on our age, or income, or outlook. It's a gift that never fades, never fails, and never grows old.

You see, **the right to be children of God is a gift.** It's not something we earn. It's a gift from our loving, merciful Father. Hear it again: "To all who received him, who believed in his name, he GAVE the right to become children of God."

It's not a matter of how often we come to church, or how often we read our Bibles, or how eloquently we pray. We don't earn the right to become children of God. It's a gift. We respond to that gift by coming to church, reading our Bibles, and praying.

After Nathaniel Hawthorne's death, it was discovered that he had left some notebooks that contained random ideas he had jotted down as they occurred to him. One of the short entries reads as follows: "Suggestion for a story in which the principal character simply never appears."

Rabbi Sidney Greenberg had this to say about Hawthorne's short entry: "Unhappily, this is the story of too many lives. The principal character simply never appears. The person we might grow into, the human being we might become, doesn't show up. Our potential greatness lies unrealized, the splendor remains imprisoned, the promise unfulfilled. Our lives develop a static character."³

I hope that doesn't happen to us. God has placed within each of us enormous potential, mental, physical, and greatest of all – the spiritual potential to become children of God.

This New Year - begin with the realization that you are an heir to the throne, not because of anything you've done, but because of what Christ has done for you. Then go into the New Year aware of who you are, to Whom you belong, and boldly claim who you can become.

³ Sidney Greenberg, *Say Yes To Life* (New York, NY: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1992).