

ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S ANGLICAN PRO-CATHEDRAL IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA

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Scripture: Various

"The Newness of God" (part 1)

HAPPY NEW YEAR!

Literally – on this first day of 2017 – a Happy and Blessed New Year!!! It is not often that January 1st falls on a Sunday. The first day of the New Year is usually a day of looking forward after reflecting on the past year. It is filled with New Year's resolutions and an anticipation that the new year will bring better things. One certainly can consider it a day of hope for the whole world.

And while some may say that it is just a day and the numbering of years is just a tradition, the reality of a new year is not man-made – its origin comes from the Lord God who made our earth and universe. **Genesis 1** declares that God made the earth and the universe in six days. He made the sun to govern the earth by day and the moon by night. He put the stars and planets in their constellations and made every plant and animal according to its kind. He rested on the seventh day. The yearly cycle can be based either on the moon or the sun – depending on which culture you are talking about. The Jews based their years on the lunar cycle. The Romans based them on the sun. We do so today. Either way the reality of days, months and years originates from the Creator. For God Himself established feasts for His people to be celebrated annually.

God created time so that we can measure our lives. Think about that for a moment. What does time enable us to do? It allows us to make plans and implement those plans, it shows us the need to rest, it helps us to look forward and reflect on our lives as we travel the journey of life. Time helps us put things into perspective. And when it comes to a New Year, the annual new beginning highlights a central aspect of God's nature – it reflects the Newness of God. God's very nature is New. And when we understand what that means and how we can experience it, it will lead not only to a fulfilling life; it will enable us to accomplish God's will for our lives.

So what I would like to do today is to first answer the question, "What is the Newness of God?" and then next week, "How do we experience it?" The Bible says that we have all been made in the image of God – that means we are like God in a number of ways – we aren't God – because we are vastly limited in all things in comparison as we are the creature and He is the Creator. But we are like God in that we have been given a mind, emotions, a will, and a spirit. We also have been given certain desires, and God has provided the means for those desires to fulfilled. One of the primary desires that every human being has is for new things, new experiences, new knowledge, and a renewal of all things. I mean, who doesn't like new things? Now I realize some may say that it is because everything is breaking down around us. We are growing old, everything we get wears out, and even our relationships can become mundane and routine.

That is true, but such things are a result of the fall. Remember what did God say to Adam and Eve? Life will require sweat and toil for food, a mother will bring forth her child in pain, there will be conflict in relationships, and people will physically die. In other words, there will be pain and suffering and death. We see this in the lives of all living things. And yet, even in the midst of the death, there is new life. Nature shows this to us constantly. Did you ever cut down a tree? What often happens? Shoots will spring forth around the stump or even on the stump paving the way for new trees. Job acknowledged this even as he despaired at the misery of his life. He said in **Job 14:7-9**, *"At least there is hope for a tree: If it is cut down, it will sprout*

again, and its new shoots will not fail. 8Its roots may grow old in the ground and its stump die in the soil, 9yet at the scent of water it will bud and put forth shoots like a plant."

GOD'S NEWNESS IS REFLECTED IN HIS NATURE

The revelation of God's Word is clear – God is the God of the New. It first reflects His nature. How do we know that? Creation itself teaches us that truth. The Apostle Paul wrote in **Romans 1:20**: *"For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made..."* So God's invisible attributes are shown by what has been made (i.e., the natural visible world). One of those attributes is the Newness of God. Everything He made in creation was new. He made it from scratch. Do you remember what God said after He made each aspect of Creation in Genesis 1? He said it was good. And then after making man in His image and had finished creating – He said that it was *"Very good."* There wasn't anything old about it. There was no such thing as old age. Old age is really not the term we use to indicate length of days on earth, it is used to signify that the cells in our body are slowly dying.

Second, since God is the essence of all living things – in order for life to continue, there must be a constant renewing of those living things if they are to continue. The cells in our bodies, even as they age, are going through a constant rejuvenation process; eventually this process ends and we die but as long as we are alive, there is rejuvenation.

We see this reality in our own lives as we seek to replace those things that are old and worn out with new things. We see it as we look to invent and improve our lives. We see it in the desire to read new books, see new movies, and travel to new places. The desire to explore, learn, and experience the diversity and complexity of life and our world that is in all of us stems from the fact we are made in God's image – it reflects God's very nature. Everything that is made is subject to decay and death, but not so with God. As we hear in **Psalm 102:25-28**: *Of old You founded the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. 26"Even they will perish, but You endure; And all of them will wear out like a garment; Like clothing You will change them and they will be changed. 27"But You are the same, And Your years will not come to an end. 28"The children of Your servants will continue, And their descendants will be established before You."*

And so we have two truths highlighted here – God does not change and is forever new, and even though the creation is perishing, God will change his people and His creation so that they will not wear out! How does He do this?

GOD'S NEWNESS IS REFLECTED IN HIS WORKS AFTER THE FALL

He does so right after the Fall of Adam and Eve. First, God promised Eve a descendant who would crush the head of the serpent and bring new life to the whole earth. This descendant would also be a descendant of Abraham through whom all the nations of the earth would be blessed - and King David through whom his kingdom would be an everlasting kingdom. In addition, God made covenants with Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham, and David, God made a covenant with Moses and the people of Israel that they would be His people and His witness and light to the Gentile world. God's law as summed up in the Decalogue or Ten Commandments would be the sign and expression of this covenant. These covenants ultimately, however, would have their ultimate fulfillment in the NEW COVENANT of Christ.

A NEW COVENANT

Jeremiah 31:31-34: *"Behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, 32not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them," declares the LORD. 33"But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD, "I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. 34"They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," declares the LORD, "for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."*

This New Covenant was established by Christ – with His life, death and resurrection. He said so on the night before He died in **Luke 22:19-20:** *"And when He had taken some bread and given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me." 20And in the same way He took the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood."*

Why blood? Quoting **Leviticus 17:11, Hebrews 9:22** reminds us that *according to the Law...without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.*" The cup which is poured out represents the Christ's life poured out for us. Christ's death paves the way for new life. We have forgiveness of sin - the chance to not only be forgiven and given a second chance but the opportunity to be set free from the bondage of sin.

A NEW BIRTH

The New Covenant paves the way for a NEW BIRTH foretold through the prophet Jeremiah. Listen to what the Apostle Peter wrote in **1 Peter 1:3-5:** *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, 5who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."*

He was echoing what Jesus had already said in the early days of His ministry – *"Unless you are born again, you cannot enter the Kingdom of God."* With the New Covenant, God gives us a New Birth and with a new birth comes new life! We have not only received forgiveness of sin but the knowledge that God loves us and wants to do a new work in our lives. He wants to not only regenerate our souls and spirits, but he wants to transform us into His likeness!

A NEW BODY

But it is not just the spirit and soul that God gives life to – He also will give us a new body. The Apostle Paul affirms this in **1 Cor. 15:35-49:**

But someone will say, "How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come?" 36You fool! That which you sow does not come to life unless it dies; 37and that which you sow, you do not sow the body which is to be, but a bare grain, perhaps of wheat or of something else. 38But God gives it a body just as He wished, and to each of the seeds a body of its own... 42So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body; 43it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; 44it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural

body, there is also a spiritual body. 45So also it is written, "The first MAN, Adam, BECAME A LIVING SOUL." The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. 46However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual. 47The first man is from the earth, earthy; the second man is from heaven. 48As is the earthy, so also are those who are earthy; and as is the heavenly, so also are those who are heavenly. 49Just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we will also bear the image of the heavenly.

It is why Christ rose from the dead in His earthly body – it was transformed into a glorified NEW body, but it was not a totally different body in its essence; it was different in its state – for Christ still had the scars from when He was crucified. Otherwise, He would not have told Thomas to see and touch the holes in his hands and side.

A NEW HEAVEN AND A NEW EARTH

But God promises something more. The present universe and earth will one day end – in fire. **2 Peter 3:7:** *"But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men."*

But God will make a new heaven and a new earth. **Rev. 21:1-5** states, *"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. 2And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. 3And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, 4and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away 5And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new."*

There you have it! The epitome of the Newness of God – Behold, I am making all things new. That, my brothers and sisters, is the statement of the God who is the I AM making all things new – constantly.

OUR HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

This is why we have hope for our future! God will make all things new! That means even if we are suffering decay and disease, distress and death, there is a bright future for the believer. God's work in our lives gives us a new purpose, a new outlook, a new reason for living. It is why the Apostle John saw this vision as recorded in **Rev. 5:7-10:** *"7And He came and took the book out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne. 8When He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. 9And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. 10" You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth."*

The four living creatures and twenty-four elders sang a new song because of what God did in Christ. And so can we! So on this New Year's Day as we begin a new year, let us indeed sing a new song – rejoicing in the Newness of God – a God who seeks to make all things *new* and has done so in the Person of His Son Jesus Christ. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, AMEN!

