

Texts: Jeremiah 31:7-14, Psalm 147:12-20; Ephesians 1:3-14; John 1:1-18

“In the beginning...”

That’s how John’s gospel begins: “In the beginning”

“In the beginning” -- before the world was created.

“In the beginning” -- of the church year.

“In the beginning” -- of this New Year, 2016.

“In the beginning” -- of God’s new beginning as the Word made flesh.

Three words, full of memory and full of promise. And today, on January 3, 2016, memory and promise are the words we need to hear.

John begins his gospel with these three words, knowing that they will trigger our memory of that other book of beginnings: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” We remember who God is, that in the beginning of everything, God is the Creator.

“In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” These three words are full of promise today, as we hear and confess that God is always about new beginnings.

We all need new beginnings. But they are never possible in a vacuum, as if the past can be set aside or forgotten. It’s a new year, but we cannot erase or change this past year. We still live in the midst of nasty political rhetoric, global unrest, national fear, and collective distrust. Sometimes we would like to think that nothing can be gained from the past. But “In the beginning” cannot turn into a rejection of the old because we want to imagine that the new is so much better.

God is not finished creating. God continues to create because God is the Creator. The need for new creation is lodged in God's truth that new creation is essential to the world, essential to God's character, and essential to how God wants to be in the world.

"In the beginning" is God as Creator, then and now, in the past, in the present and in the future. "In the beginning" is the memory of God making all things new. "In the beginning" is the promise of God's steadfast love, there and then, here and now. "In the beginning" is the promise that God will never let us go, no matter what happens, no matter what the future brings.

This is the meaning of those three words: God says new things. God is new things. God becoming human is "in the beginning" in its fullest form. It is light once again. It is the goodness of humanity once again. It is God recreating God's very self because that is who God is and that is what we will be as believers -- reborn children of God.

"The Word became flesh and lived among us." This flesh. Skin and bones. Your body and mine. God becoming flesh means God *gets* flesh. God understands what it feels like and what it means to be human. And because of that, God will never give up on what God has created. Nothing is beyond God's reach. God realized that we human beings, God's beautiful creations, we need to experience re-creation on a regular basis. Otherwise, life is too much about death.

We need this promise -- the promise of God's commitment to recreating God's very self, our selves, and the world. It's the creation story all over again: God's created the heavens and the earth, God created humankind in God's own image, and God created you. Too often we want to let go of what and who we have been so as to be something entirely new. But to carry forward our past for the sake of our present and future makes it possible

to come to terms with who we thought we were, who we now are, and who we are called to be.

“In the beginning” is not simply a reset or change.

“In the beginning” is not disregarding the present or the past.

“In the beginning” is the assurance that our hopes for re-creation do not depend solely on what we do. Because we can’t re-create ourselves. This is God’s work.

“In the beginning” is the promise of re-creation, a promise we know to be true because God sent his Son so that we could know God’s very self. “It is God the only Son who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known.”

“In the beginning” is the promise of re-creation, the promise that you received in your baptism, when you were named and claimed and sealed with the cross of Christ forever. If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation. “In the beginning” means that you have been given a new beginning.

“In the beginning” is the very nature of God. And since we are God’s witnesses and God’s followers, we ourselves proclaim that God’s re-creation is everywhere around us. God’s re-creation abounds, even in the face of people, situations, and the world’s circumstances that would seek to prove otherwise.

“In the beginning” is the promise of God, the promise of new life, abundant life, life that is the light of all people. This light shines in the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome it.

“In the beginning” begins today, now and forever, Amen.