

“Beginnings”

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KOINONIA

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“Beginnings”
By Rev. Emily Joye McGaughy
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John 1: 1-16

...Pray...

“In the beginning...”
Starts Genesis. First words of the first book.

“In the beginning...”
Starts the Gospel of John. First words of the spiritual
Gospel.

Creation is the story of a beginning. Christmas is the story
of a beginning.

Religion tells of beginnings. Tells us the how and why of
firsts, of starts. Religion gives us the holy kick off stories,
the moment when “pfew” something gets set in motion.
This is true of all world religions. Every religious group has
a beginning story, or two or three. Religion is in the
business of telling us how and why we began and that’s a
good thing because human beings can deal with a whole lot
of chaos and a whole lot of confusion, but we cannot thrive
as a species without making meaning about who we are,
where we came from, and why we are here.

“In the beginning” stories help us make meaning of those
things, not in a scientific way, but in a spiritual way. Both
are equally important but our faith stories only do the
latter. Our religion in particular gives us multiple
beginnings. Both in Genesis and in the Gospels. Whether
we are talking about the creation of the Cosmos or the birth
of Christ, we’ve got beginnings plural. Though the more
conservative folk among us would like us to believe that
Creation and Christ’s conception happened one way with

one meaning for all time, there is simply no biblical support for such a claim. The truth is God gives us multiple, plural beginnings, not just in text, but throughout the course of our lives. We are asked to begin again and again.

Sometimes we begin new adventures: like going to graduate school, or moving to a new place for a job. Sometimes we begin new families: we plan to be married or partnered long-term, or we begin trying to have children. Sometimes we get sober and begin the long, hard and wondrous path of recovery, a life free from the death grip of addiction. Sometimes we begin a new relationship that beckons us to heights of vulnerability and honesty we never could have imagined. Sometimes we begin coming out into an identity that's been inside us all along but one we must now learn to wear on the outside. You get me; we are always beginning, again and again. So I personally think it's quite benevolent of our tradition to hand over so many beginning stories for us to choose from as we make meaning with our lives.

We've got rhythmic, call and response beginnings in Genesis One. We've got elemental, earthy, messy beginnings in Genesis Two. We've got the crying out prophetic beginning in Mark where everything starts with the voice of one making preparation for revolution. Then there's the not so sexy beginning of Matthew's Gospel: all genealogical, all about the patriarchal line. Luke on the other hand, starts with a historical sketch, rooted in relationships between religions, families, and women. Then there's John, who waxes such a poetic masterpiece beginning with his luscious language that we are left with suspended breath, receiving as the text says "grace upon grace."

Multiple beginnings. Plural beginnings. Different ways of beginning. Different reasons to begin. But begin we must again and again in this life. Begin again and again God does, in this book, in this world, in our midst.

I'm going to keep it short this morning because there's been a whole lot of church goin on in the last week and I actually want some of you to come back in 2012. So for the rest of this word, I want to focus on what is true about all of these beginning stories, want to focus on the consistent thread woven in all of them, but what is pronounced most beautiful in the way John begins.

In every story of beginning, but particularly in the story of Christ's beginning, there is the will of God for something to be born. God wills birth. A spiritual seed is planted within: within the waters, within the soil, within the spirit, within the minds of people. God wills birth, wills things to begin. So: beloved, if you feel something, a spark, a mustard seed, inside of your life that God wants something to be born through you, no matter how non-sensical it might seem: pay attention to that.

Second: God shows up in the flesh (yes, some of you already heard this part) and continues to nurture and support whatever God wills to be born. Don't expect spiritual, airy-fairy signs that turn you into a different person over night. That rarely happens. God shows up in the flesh and it's a process. A material process that includes skin and bones, relationships and labor. Bodies bodies bodies: sometimes your own, sometimes the bodies of others, sometimes bodies you're bringing into the world. God shows up in the flesh, in bodies. Pay attention to that. If you are trying to begin a new thing in your life, watch for the bodies, the humans, your own capacities—in the flesh—that come from near and fear, that come unexpectedly, that come right on time. Watch for those incarnations of God in your life. Let them be the gift bearers, faithful witnesses, and life-preservers they are meant to be for you.

Finally: what is born of God in your life, if it is born of God, truly born of God, will be full of grace and truth, grace and truth not just for you, but grace and truth that as our text says "enlightens everyone." When God gives birth, it is not

for the sake of fulfilling some single handed desire. It is to alter the world, forever, so that everyone receives grace upon grace. God's birth is always just a beginning and not an end, it is the spark of huge things to come. I mean, think about it. We are sitting here 2000+ years after the birth of Christ still considering the implications of his coming into the world. He touched so many lives, so many social systems, so much untapped wisdom and truth and grace that we are still here trying to live into his legacy. How could the world have known about that legacy when he was delivered into a manger, surrounded by barn animals, family and strangers in Bethlehem so long ago? The world didn't know. God knew. God gives birth for the sake of the multitude, for the enlightenment of everyone. So if God is beginning something new in your life, pay attention to that. It's bigger than you though you are a chosen vessel.

Multiple beginnings. Plural beginnings. Different ways of beginning. Different reasons to begin. But begin we must again and again in this life. Begin again and again God does, in this book, in this world, in our midst.

In the beginning: a seed.

In the beginning: flesh.

In the beginning: grace and truth for everyone.

The Good News on this holiday: God's beginnings may not always be the same, but they always dwell among us, in seed, in flesh, in grace and truth for all.

Merry Christmas, amen.

