

Lectionary C 2nd Sunday of Christmas January 3, 2016
Grace and Peace Lutheran Church, Evansville, IN
Pastor Roberta Meyer

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

Old Maple Trees and New Beginnings

It happened yesterday. They came in with a big machine and cut it down...the maple tree in my yard, the one under which my daughter played in her sand box when she was little... the one I always parked my car under in the summer when I wanted it in the shade. Yes, it was under that tree where I washed my car, too. That tree is the one I saw when I looked out my kitchen window when I washed dishes. I loved looking at it in the winter, when it snowed. It was beautiful how the snow clung to it, as it was decorated for its part in the country winter scene on the farm.

That tree showed me the first signs of spring. I watched the buds swell as spring approached and then those little helicopters swirled around and planted themselves all over the place. I'd find baby maple trees growing in my flower beds. I used to dig them up and take them to school to teach my kindergarten children about how trees grow. You know, maybe there are some of my tree's offspring planted in the northern part of Vanderburgh county where most of my students from Scott school lived. I like that thought.

Especially now that it is gone. Nothing but a stump, and not even a good stump, that I could sit on, but a low to the ground stump, that probably won't be there long, either.

I know that tree had been struck by lightning several times and the top got blown out of it in a storm a while back. Dave said there was a big spit in it and there was a real danger of it falling on our house. I know all that and I understand it was for the best, but, I didn't like seeing it go. I will miss it.

Besides with that tree gone the whole ecological environment around my house will change. Because of its abundant shade, I always planted plants that did not like sun. Now, that part of my flower bed will be in full sun.

I wonder if I will need to get a blind to block out the sun coming through that window above my kitchen sink. But I realize something. After our reading from John, I realize that yes, the tree is gone, but with its demise is a whole new beginning for our yard.

A new beginning with sunshine and beautiful flowers on that side of my house. A new beginning where I don't have to dig up hundreds of baby maple trees in order to prevent a forest in my flower beds. A new beginning where the view from my kitchen window looks out on the rolling hills of the countryside, and none of it is blocked by a big maple tree. I will remember that tree. And its absence will make me very aware of the new life growing where it once was.

John writes, *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.”*

Well, the light is shining in my yard a lot brighter now. And John is testifying to a new beginning for all of us, with a bright light leading us to new life.

In the beginning was the Word... Jesus. John’s gospel tells us what used to be. In the beginning of the world, it takes us back to the first words in the first book of the Bible, Genesis 1. To understand the new beginning it is important that we remember the Garden of Eden. *In the beginning was the Word...* Jesus was there when creation changed this planet from a big glob of nothing into a place full of life. And John is telling us this so we understand the gift of the new beginning, the new creation full of light, and we that are all chosen to be a part of it.

In the beginning was the Word... John describes Jesus as “the Word” or “Logos”, in the Greek, sometimes translated as God’s logic, reason, or rationale. David Lose, in his weekly blog says, “Jesus is God’s word and promise to us, God speaking as clearly as possible. God in Jesus, John makes clear, is doing something new. In earlier days, God gave the law and the prophets as expressions of God’s will, but now God is going a step further, actually speaking to us directly and personally in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.”

John writes, *“And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.”* This flesh and blood Word of God opens up the possibility of a new relationship with God. That is why this passage in John is called the new Genesis.

. “No one,” John confirms, *“has ever seen God.”* We know that all too well. I mean, when the craziness of this world happens, when tragedy strikes, junk we don’t get, like the violence and shootings that have happened this past year. When disappoint crushes us down, there have been doors closed and things we planned fall through the cracks. When hope and happiness seem to have left us in a pit of depression and sadness, times of mourning, death and fear. Yes, these times happened to us at some point last year. And if we are honest, there have been, if only a fleeting moment, times when we couldn’t help but wondering where God was.

Just last week I talked to two separate people in two completely unrelated situations and they both told me the same thing. “I’m mad at God. Where in the world was God? Why did God leave me alone at a time like this?” One was a young mother going through a divorce, and the other was from a mother whose son was in jail.

Sometimes we mourn the loss of what was and thus feel the absence of those “maple trees” in our lives, equating our loss as the absence of God.

That is where Jesus, the Word made Flesh, comes in. Jesus, the human God comes right in bringing us a new beginning. In this new beginning we are cradled right there with Jesus in that manger wrapped in God’s love. The laws of the Old Testament are no longer the cold last word of a distant God. Jesus came to earth as a human to be God’s Word, God’s love letter to us letting us know beyond a shadow of a doubt that there is nothing God wouldn’t do, nowhere God

won't go, nothing God won't endure – even the loss of God's beloved Son so we could know we are God's beloved children, worthy of dignity, honor, and love.

Our Ephesians text tells us this according to the Message Bible: *Long, long ago [God] decided to adopt us into his family through Jesus Christ. (What pleasure he took in planning this!) He wanted us to enter into the celebration of his lavish gift-giving by the hand of his beloved Son.*

There is so much more for us than, lightning battered, rotting old maple trees. Jesus is right here with us shining bright to guide us in new beginnings and new life.

I have a choice with the way I look at my maple tree situation. I can mourn the loss of the tree and hold on to my old ways, or I can honor that tree, feel it's loss, then look forward to new beginnings, where more sunlight, more space, and fewer seedling pests bring new possibilities to my yard.

My friend who is experiencing a painful divorce can feel that pain and honor it, then look forward to new life, with new light as Jesus is right there in the middle of her life holding on to her. God's Word, God's wisdom is shining a new way for her.

My friend who is infuriated at the situation her son is in, can hold on to Jesus' hand so Jesus' love is a beacon of hope and new life for her and her son.

So as we stand at the crux of this New Year, we should definitely look back on last year, noting the losses, honoring our pain, admitting our fears, and naming our grief. We should also recognize the gifts the old year had for us, and celebrate the good times. Then we should look forward to the light of new beginnings.

And our job in this is to be that light for God's children who can't see brightness because of their gloom. We are reminded in Ephesians that this was the plan from the very beginning in the Garden of Eden, *"Long before we first heard of Christ and got our hopes up, he had his eye on us, had designs on us for glorious living..."*

Is that why, every New Year, we see a clean slate, where we set new goals, or some call them resolutions? We look forward to a new start. Some of our plans will happen and some will not, but that's all right because we have God's promise of light that the darkness of life will not overcome.

Nadia Bolz-Weber posted this on Facebook this week. *"My yearly reminder: There is no resolution that, if kept, will make me more worthy to be loved."*

As we begin this new year, let's realize maple trees will come down and new beginnings we could never dream of will surprise us. And Jesus, God's Love Letter to us, will always be there for us lighting the way no matter what. Happy New Year!