

The Second Wind

Homecoming Sunday

Text: Lamentations 3: 19-26; Isaiah 43: 18-21; Revelation 21: 1-5

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September 11, 2016

The threshold of a new season . . . a mid summer night's dream . . . and the blessing of a second wind. These are the thoughts that I come back home with this morning. God willing, we can hold these three together as we listen with the ears of our hearts.

So, let's plunge right into this season - new and fresh and waiting! It's been very much on my mind these recent days. September always stirs such thoughts in me. There is just something about coming back from the pause of summer, about the cusp of a more accustomed rhythm of life, about stepping over the threshold into something new that calls up my best energy. It touches a longing in me that is, in fact, universal in nature. And that is the hunger every now and again for a fresh start, a clean slate, a second chance, a new beginning.

Peter Gomes, once pastor of Harvard's Memorial Chapel, was speaking at Northfield-Mount Hermon School. His favorite part of such engagements was fielding comments and questions – particularly from young people. Being of note-worthy intellect he was often asked some rather heady things, ethereal things, even esoteric things. But this time and to the contrary a young man stood and asked something so straight-forward that Gomes was startled by its nascent simplicity and bare honesty: "Professor Gomes, what inspires you?" Gomes was just as startled with the simplicity of his response, which came almost instantly. "What inspires me is the beginning of each new day. When I wake up each morning and pinch myself to see if I am still alive I rejoice that I have been given a chance to start over."¹

Of course, he was talking about the gift of a new beginning, not just another morning; the gift of starting over, which btw, we are given again this and every morning. Isaiah puts it in the language of scripture as he spoke for God; and here I quote the Jerusalem Bible: "No need to remember past events. No need to think about what was done before. Look, I am doing something new!"²

It might sharpen the point and deepen our understanding to remember that Isaiah was called by some a prophet of hope because he talked about starting over in some pretty arduous times; times when waking up and feeling hopeful were more of a longed for dream than present reality.

But wait then just a minute! Not so fast! And certainly not so easy! It's inspiring for sure to want a fresh start. But also universal to human life is that we are hard-wired with reluctance in the face of the new. We want it and until we don't want it. Or we want it as long as it doesn't ask too much of us. And while the fresh air of a new beginning is enticing, we are, many to most, pretty darn well wed to the past.

I had a dream a few weeks ago that it was today, homecoming Sunday, our threshold moment of coming back together. I stood in the doorway of our front right here on South Main and as I did I was overcome by light that simply poured out of the narthex. It wasn't a blinding light, but one that was warm, invitational, revelatory, showing me something new and different.

As I entered I found that the walls of the Meeting House were bright and fresh with new paint. But oddly, they were not fixed and solid walls. They were fluid and permeable. Light and breeze passed through them as if they were not quite there. There were lots of people in the room but also outside the room; but oddly again, neither inside or out were separate spaces. It's as if the room was a portal that opened out to the world.

Hospitality, friendliness, and deep joy were everywhere. Young faces and seasoned. Music, art, prayer, color, pottery, weaving, singing, jazz, children, drums, goodness, learning, worshipping, dancing: it was all here, a community of kindred spirits fully alive. I looked around and said to myself, "I had no idea!"

Still in my dream, we all sang together a very old hymn in a very new way: "Great is your faithfulness, God our creator, morning by morning new mercies I see." Those words, incidentally, are not only words from an old hymn, they are from Jeremiah who has also been called a prophet of hope, and also who spoke to a discouraged, forlorn, deflated time. But never mind, we were all exuberantly glad as we sang Jeremiah's words!

And then I woke up! Shazbutt! I was so enjoying the dream! So I lay in the dark and found myself saying: "We can do this. We have come so far, so very far in reinventing First Church. And though we have miles to go and rivers to cross and challenges galore we are not the church of yesterday anymore, as once we were. We are becoming the church of tomorrow."

Along my summer's way I read Krista Tippett's book, Becoming Wise: An Inquiry into Mystery and the Art of Living. It's a fascinating collection of her thoughts spun around what she calls the five breeding grounds of wisdom. Best of all she salts and peppers those breeding grounds with some of the transcripts from interviews on her radio broadcast, "On Being" on NPR. If you ever listen-in you know that the collection of voices and perspectives from her interviews with varied guests is rich and vast.

Among her many partners in conversation was Eve Ensler, author, play-write, activist. They got talking about the amazing power of making a new start and of getting a second chance in life. Her words: "We have to remember that we are people of the second wind. You know, I've always loved it when you're running and running and running, and suddenly you get that next wind (a breath you were not at all expecting) and you keep on going. And I've always been very curious about what lives in that space of the second wind. What's really in there – what part of us - spiritually, physically, emotionally, intellectually? What is it, or what are the ingredients of it? It's mysterious because you don't do a lot of thinking about it, it just comes upon us."³

And so there in the dark of my bed, still thinking about the dream which I wanted to fall back to sleep to, I found myself saying, "Yes. That's just it. As Christians we are a people of the dawn, of the second wind, or in Easter's terms, the third day. And this second wind, this Spirit of life, is a mystery. We don't have to over-think it. In fact, we can't over-think it. It just comes upon us."

Now I don't know where any of this touches down in your life today. But I do know this. We have again, by virtue of the dawn, a new day before us, a fresh season, a new chapter – that's part of September's eternal blessing! We have, by God's good grace, the dream of things yet possible – in all variety and shape and size! And we are offered, free for the taking, the deepest kind of newness that any life can ever find – the second wind of the very Spirit of life.

In whatever way you might take hold of such thoughts today, may it be so. For these are the gifts of God for the people of God. And they are all right here . . . for you and for me and for all of God's own. Amen

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¹ Peter Gomes. Strength for the Journey. Harper/San Francisco, 2003, p. 258.

² Translation from: The New Jerusalem Bible, Isaiah 43:18-19.

³ Krista Tippitt. Becoming Wise: An Inquiry into the Mystery and Art of Living. Penguin Press, 2016, p.