

**September 19, 2021**  
**Seventeenth after Pentecost / Proper 20**

Meditation: "New Beginnings"

I don't know whether you noticed or not, but a couple of weeks ago was the Jewish holiday Rosh Hashanah. It ran from sunset of September 6 to sunset of September 8. Rosh Hashanah is, literally, the head of the year. It is the new year for renewal. It is the time to focus attention on ultimate spiritual truth; for learning how a human being can turn toward God.

The fact that Rosh Hashanah falls in the seventh month of the Jewish calendar, and not the first, got me thinking about how we mark a new year in general. There is New Year's day, January 1; there is spring, when the crocuses break through the soil and the songbirds return from the south; there is the start of the school year, in September; there is the start of the liturgical year, the first Sunday of Advent, which falls either at the end of November or the beginning of December. Can you think of others?

What the new year brings, is a new beginning. I think of the new beginning that many Afghan refugees will be making as they settle into new lives in North America, Europe, Pakistan, the Middle East, and elsewhere. And there is the new beginning that some of the homeless in St. Thomas will be making next month as they settle into their new micro apartments at Rail City Lofts.

The Rail City Lofts were developed by Indwell, an organization that creates affordable housing communities that support people seeking health, wellness and belonging. It's not just deeply affordable housing, but there is also on-site support staff who provide nursing, addiction support, food security, community engagement, and other supports. Having these supports on-site saves calls to 911 for EMS and police, and the eventual involvement of hospital and justice systems. It was to raise money for Indwell's work in London and St. Thomas that I walked yesterday; to raise money for the most vulnerable and marginalized in our communities to have a new beginning.

Let me tell you a story about Val, whom I met in Toronto when I was working street outreach. Her story is not connected to Indwell, but her story will give you an idea of the life of those Indwell seeks to help. Val was a crack addict and a street person. She and her boyfriend found shelter, with a family of skunks, in an abandoned condo sales trailer. Val had been employed by the TTC, until her addiction got to the point that she was an unreliable worker. Life for Val was not glamorous. You can imagine how she earned the cash she needed to feed her addiction. And her boyfriend, while protective of her, also beat the tar out of her when he was stoned and drunk. One night he knocked three teeth out of her mouth and left her badly bruised and battered. She wanted out. We had been working with Val, and the TTC had agreed to take her back, with conditions. A new beginning was possible.

Things are changing here and now for us. There are new beginnings in our lives. In two more weeks we will return from COVID exile to our sanctuary for the first time in a year and a half. In order for something new to happen, somethings will have to end. I think that is the message Jesus had for the disciples when he told them that he was to be betrayed, killed, and three days later he would rise again. He was telling them that something new was going to happen, but in order for something new to happen, something had to die.

For Val, the something that had to die was that she had to break ties with all of her street friends and social contacts. She had to stop living in the old sales trailer and get into a shelter or halfway house. She had to stop earning money for drugs the way she had been. She had to seek addiction counselling. She had to turn her whole entire life upside down all at the same time to create new support networks, housing, habits, and return to paid employment. The way to new life passes through death, and that can be both extremely frightening, because it is a journey into the unknown, and exhilarating, because of the possibilities that lie ahead.

So what has to die, as we return to the sanctuary? Well, we will have to stay physically distanced from one another. We will have to wear masks for the entire time we are there. We will have to change the way we do things like collect the offering or hold Sunday School. Is it time to stop 'time for the young and the young at heart'? Even how we enter and exit the building will change – in one door and out another. And no more socializing in the sanctuary before or after worship.

What about new possibilities? Well, for one thing we will, for the first time ever, include in worship people who are not even in the sanctuary. Those who can't get to the building, or who are uncomfortable returning to in-person worship can join by zoom. They will be able to hear what we are doing, and we will be able to see and hear them. That's pretty exciting! We will be more inclusive in our worship through the use of technology.

What other changes are happening in your lives, individually or as a community? What has to die? What frightens you? What are the new possibilities? What is exciting? You see, for something new to be born, something old must end. We can either live in fear, and die in fear, or we can embrace the exciting possibilities of new life, in spite of the fear. Knowing that God is always with us, makes everything a little less frightening. Thanks be to God.