

Do you have trouble remember that this is 2009? How many times have you written the date with 2008 and had to change it, or didn't even realize that you did it? The New Year gives us a new beginning, or at least we hope so. It is the chance to start fresh. Maybe that is why so many people make resolutions, or "do overs." They are looking for a fresh start in the new year.

2008 certainly had a chaotic ending. On that national level we had the financial bailouts, the presidential election and the big questions about "The Big Three." On a more personal level, many of us faced some challenging times including job uncertainty or the loss of a job, family instability, personal financial crisis, deaths of people we love, and unexpected illnesses. We look to 2009 for a new, a better year. But will it be better or will it be more of the same.

In times like these we need to remember that God has the power to turn chaos into a new creation. Genesis 1 tells us that God called everything into existence by the power of His Word. But it also tells us that creation started out as chaos. (Genesis 1:1-2) *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and empty, and darkness covered the deep waters. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters.* God took the pre-creation chaos and made something beautiful, something wonderful out of it. Genesis 1 tells us that God's creation was very good. God's Spirit has tremendous creative power.

God made a new beginning for a man by the name of Naaman. His story is recorded in 2 Kings chapter 5 in the Old Testament. He was a military commander from Aram, an enemy nation of Israel. He came to Elisha, the prophet of the Lord, looking for help because he had leprosy. Elisha told him to go wash himself seven times in the muddy Jordan River, the same river where John the Baptist baptized Jesus. At first Naaman resisted claiming that the rivers in his home town were much better. It took some urging before Naaman agreed and washed himself in the Jordan. When he came out of the water his skin was restored like a young boy's. God made a new beginning for Naaman.

God made a new beginning in Jesus' day. Those were certainly chaotic times in Israel. The nation was under Roman dominance. The high tax rate imposed by the Romans made for tough economic times. The nation was divided into territories controlled by the Roman governor and by sons of Herod the Great. The Zealots hated the Romans and could have been considered "terrorists." The Herodians worked with the Romans and could have been considered "traitors" by the common people. The people were also divided spiritually. The Pharisees power base was in the synagogues and taught the people to obey the laws. The Sadducees controlled the temple and set the requirements for the temple rituals and sacrifices.

This was the world of Jesus and John the Baptist. John the Baptist was sent to prepare the people for the arrival of Jesus. He did it by calling the people to repent, to turn back to God and make a

new beginning. He did it by pointing the people to Jesus, the one more powerful who would give them the Holy Spirit. Jesus build on the work of John the Baptist. He also called the people to repent and turned their world upside down. He taught the people that obeying the rules and observing the rituals would not save them. They needed something else. They needed God to give them a new beginning. That is why Jesus came. He called the people back to God, back to lives of faith and service.

But that is not all that Jesus did. He didn't just tell the people what they had to do, He did everything they needed and we need for a new beginning. God's perfect world got messed up when people disobeyed Him, turned their backs on Him, and did their own thing. The Bible calls that sin and says the consequence for sin is death. God hates sin but loves the sinners. So God gave the promise to give new life to people. Jesus fulfilled that promise by taking the sin of the world on Himself, dying in our place, and rising from the dead. Jesus gives us the hope and the promise of a new beginning.

If you started reading through the Bible with us at the start of the year and are following the suggested readings printed in the bulletin and newsletter, then you read in Mark 9 about a boy with an evil spirit. His father brought him to Jesus for help and said to Jesus, "If you can." Jesus answered that "everything is possible with God." Then he ordered the evil spirit to leave the boy and gave him a new life, a new beginning.

God can make all things new in our times, too. Have you heard about Mr. Jalopy? He has started something called "The Maker Movement." His credo is "If it is broke, do fix it!" He started the Maker Movement to unite men with a simple idea: transform something nearly obsolete into something useful. For example, one member of the Maker Movement took a VCR and made an automated cat feeder. Mr. Jalopy uses stuff to make stuff.

God can make a new beginning for us, too. He can take the chaos and confusion in our lives and make a new beginning. Sometimes we need the chaos of life to turn us back to God because we become too comfortable the way things are. We need to remember that chaos doesn't rule, God rules. Romans 8:28 puts it this way, ***"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."*** He can take our uncertain job situation and gives us a whole new career, one that is more meaningful or fulfilling. If we let Him, he can heal our families and restore broken relationships. God can use the health crisis that we face to help us refocus on what is most important in our lives.

God can make all things new. Everything is possible with God. Remember this promise God gives us in 2 Corinthians 5:17, ***"If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"*** Chaos doesn't rule. God rules. Celebrate the new beginning He is giving you. Amen.