

We are ten days into a new year. And if we're honest, it takes at least this long to get ourselves sorted where the calendar is concerned. New Year's observances happen in the midst of a holiday fog. There are too many things going on until, eight or ten days in, we begin to notice things have changed.

In the 'good old days' it might take that long before you had to write your first cheque - and then you notice the date needs changing. January brings a subtle shift in priorities to most working people - new seasons, new products; inventories and annual meetings; winter strategy sessions anticipating spring sales bonanzas - January kicks all that off. December is for taking stock and catching breath. In January, the race begins again.

Now beginnings - of all kinds - are glorious, perilous times. New relationships, new jobs, new year, new programs; all of these hold equal measure of problem and promise. Everything is 'potential.' Some of that potential may have been building for years - for generations. Sometimes a new thing is just an old thing reimagined. "What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done; there is nothing new under the sun." (Ecclesiastes 1:9) This is not what we want to hear in January, and certainly not after the year we have just experienced. But beginnings ARE glorious and perilous. All of them - every time.

Think about how perilous it must have been for the ancient Hebrew storytellers and theologians to suggest that the beginning of all things was accomplished with words - and acknowledged by the One who utters those words as GOOD. Most ancient origin stories among Mediterranean cultures (Persian, Greco-Roman, & Mesopotamian) speak of murder and mayhem as the creative agency. In the Greek stories, humanity exists only for the diversion of the gods of Olympus. The 'divine' realm is perfect and the human realm is tarnished - lesser-than. Creation is not celebrated - it is an unfortunate consequence of divine action.

Not so for those who gave us the majesty and mystery of the first chapters of Genesis.

Chaos is overcome with beauty and order. There is a regular rhythm of the building up of Creation - each step celebrated as being 'good,' leading to the ultimate proclamation (chapter 1 verse 31) of the whole enterprise being 'VERY GOOD.'

So imagine the wonder - the suspicion - the behind-the-hand, whispered criticism when this explanation was first proposed...

Glorious and perilous. Are you suggesting that other ideas about the beginnings of the universe are *wrong*? What is this generously creative God up to? Is this a trick of some kind...? Sure, it sounds wonderful, but what's the catch?

Turns out the 'catch' is that there is no catch. Within the Hebrew story, every step that humanity has since taken away from the perfection of those early days of Creation has been because of the human suspicion that there might be a divine agenda at work. And unless you consider God's desire to share love, compassion, justice, mercy etc with every living thing 'an agenda' ...there's no catch.

This beginning was an attempt at a new start - a complete re-imagining of the relationship between humankind and the Divine. And we've been challenging that relationship on general principles ever since we could form the thought.

So it is that several millennia into the project, another new idea is launched. Another desert prophet calls on God's people to open their tired eyes - a man named Jesus submits to John's baptism and that voice makes itself known again. On the edge of a desert, on the cusp of revolution, the encouraging sound of the voice that subdued Creation's early chaos congratulates Jesus for his choice:

"You are my beloved son; with you I am well pleased."

I would give anything to hear that voice speak into the chaos of this week. In the midst challenges old and new - at the end of a year that most certainly marks the beginning of something - in a time marked by the kind of uncertainty that almost always marks fundamental societal change, I dare say we would all welcome the sound of that encouraging, affirming, orderly voice. "Peace, be still! Know that I AM, GOD." What difference would it make, I wonder, if even one person acknowledged that voice - responded in a positive fashion - set themselves on the path to peace in spite of the hundreds of thousands of voices urging otherwise...?

We stand at the threshold of something that may or may not be ours to control - a glorious, perilous time. Governments are questioned, people are agitating for change (in every direction!), and public health concerns are eating into our sense of self - into the very foundations of our societal presumptions. The world that is emerging will not be immediately familiar to us. Businesses will have adapted - social conventions will be altered - the church will remember that there is more to faith than favourite hymns,

coffee and cookies. We have been challenged to re-imagine our role - -to reconsider our assumptions. Glorious and perilous.

But we do not face any of this alone.

At the revealing of every new thing we are assured of the presence of God - who sometimes announces that presence with a word of grace; or even more often tempts us forward with the echo of ancient promises. Whatever else you imagine about what is being revealed, know that the one who calmed chaos into Creation - the same voice that encouraged Jesus as he emerged from the muddy Jordan River - know that God will continue to calm and encourage us into whatever waits for us.