



January 5, 2021

Greet a New Beginning

By The Rev. Susan D. Parsons

In the last fifteen years or so of living on the west coast, I made it almost a spiritual devotion to drive about thirty miles north of San Francisco to North Beach in Point Reyes on New Year's Eve to watch the sun set for the last time that year. I went alone, stood at the edge of the water, and thought of the "stuff" I needed to leave behind – the habits, the sins, the regrets, the things undone that all now needed to be laid on the beach and carried away by the ocean.

This was my way of physically washing away the year's detritus. North Beach is perfect for this meditative act – even on the sunniest of days, it's chilly and wind swept with a dangerous, pounding surf. No sunbathers or surfers – just sharks, undertows, a wide and sandy beach, and a sprinkling of people dressed in fur.

Sometimes it was cloudy, so “sunset” was more of a “light set.” But other years, I saw the spouts of whales on the horizon or an immense, colorful, farewell tapestry would spread out in front of me. And once, a peach-pink ethereal light enfolded me as the sun touched the horizon – a light so unearthly I briefly wondered if St. Peter would be arriving to “take me home.”

And yet. As many times as I stood there at sunset meditating on the beach, I never once got up before dawn the next morning to stand at the edge of something beautiful – perhaps a big Golden Bridge – to watch the sun rise and think about the beginning year. This seems odd now, especially since Christmas was not exactly a distant memory when I went out there.

Christmas is really all about new beginnings. When Jesus is born, the whole world receives a radical, new understanding of what it means to be just and true and good, what it means to love. The poor, the dispirited, the homeless, the stranger, the sick, the just plain weird, they are all now the blessed. And every time we act to lift up these blessed ones, we become God-bearers. We give birth to goodness, light, love, and peace.

And it all happens whether or not we leave our offenses and burdens of things done and left undone on a windswept beach.

When 2020 began, we all had plans, ideas, and hopes. We looked forward to times to get to know each other, minister together, have parties and go places, talk at coffee hour, and maybe even develop inside jokes with one another. But our beginning together has been messy, and the pandemic has left me – and I imagine you, too – feeling frustrated, irritable, and even grieving at all we lost in 2020.

Perhaps my call to move to the East Coast and to minister with all of you at Immanuel, also means it’s time for me to leave behind the beach at sunset and instead get up at sunrise on New Year’s morning and greet a new beginning. How far can it be to the nearest beach? Or perhaps, with this new birth, it’s enough for me to watch the sun rise through the windows of my house. Wherever I am – wherever we are – we greet a new beginning.

Christmas isn't just about a magnificent and miraculous event that happened a long time ago and is over now. Christmas is about God's endless desire to work with each of us and get us to begin again. And it is the time to create with God a home and family – a safe and welcome place – for everyone on earth.