

January 14, 2018 – Soli Deo Gloria
By Wayne J. Schneider

"New Beginnings."

Revelation 3:8

I stumbled upon this anecdote recently and I want to share it with you. A postal worker who, as part of his job, was processing mail that was so illegible the computers could not read it.

One day, a letter addressed to God in a shaky hand landed on his desk. He thought he should open it and so he did. This is what he read: "Dear God, I am a 91-year-old widow, living on a tiny pension. Yesterday someone stole my purse. It had \$100 in it, which was all the money I had until my next pension check. Next Sunday is Christmas, and I had invited two of my friends over for dinner. Without that money, I have nothing to buy food with. I have no family to turn to, and you are my only hope. Can you please help me? Sincerely, Edna."

Her words touched him deeply, so he shared the letter with his peers. They collected ninety-six dollars which they sent to Edna. All the postal employees had a warm glow because of their kind action.

Christmas arrived and departed, and a few days later another letter addressed to God arrived. All the workers gathered around as the letter was opened. "Dear God, how can I ever thank you enough for what you did for me? Because of your gift of love, I was able to fix a glorious dinner for my friends. We had a very nice day, and I told my friends about your wonderful gift. By the way, there was \$4 missing. I think it must have been those thieves at the Post Office. Sincerely, Edna."

An open door is a potent symbol for anyone in any situation, looking to launch a new beginning. One of Jesus' magnificent proclamations is found in St. John's gospel: "I am the door." (10:9) This door is held open by the irresistible, divine power any wounded and broken soul is searching for, so she or he may begin

again. The image of Jesus standing outside the door knocking, awaiting an invitation from inside, is a picture of loving hope. (Revelation 3:20)

This open door is held by God's glorious power, and implies that God in Jesus has already worked on your and my behalf. We do not open the door because Jesus has already done that; we simply walk through it.

The Roman God Janus, for which the month of January is named, reminds the reasonable person to consider a new beginning in all arenas of life. It is a sensible, timely reminder that comes to us annually. The open door invitation in the Book of Revelation is not an annual suggestion. Instead, it is an 'anytime' proposition. There may be a new beginning in your life whenever you are ready.

There is a plethora of items other than the calendar, that can help us to be conscious of our need of, and the opportunity for a new beginning. When someone we love dies life is never the same again. The power of the death of a spouse or a child or a significant other, profoundly transforms relationships and emotions, and new beginnings are essential.

Shock and grief require time and the presence of loved ones and friends. Many cultures are better than ours at being empathetic and investing the space needed to help others to heal and journey through the valley of the shadow of death.

As the grieving progresses, friends, family and life begins again. Any significant loss requires a period of grief and readjustment before beginning again. Eric Hoffer, Longshoreman, turned philosopher, reminds us that a person's heart is in a grave long before that person is buried. Hope, desire, beauty, and youth die. All loss requires a reassessment of life to accommodate that loss.

All of us have witnessed the necessity of new beginnings in marriage; indeed, we see this in the ubiquitous, ever increasing numbers of divorces. An example was

posted on my Facebook wall this week; it read: "So apparently RSVP'ing to a wedding invitation, 'Maybe next time,' isn't the correct response."

The lives of our children are hurriedly rearranged in painful ways, long before they can comprehend what and why the divorce has happened. Divorce forces unwanted new beginnings: emotional, financial, and physical to name a few. And, while these new beginnings may produce healthier lives later on, they do nothing to alter the devastating pain of the present.

Pastors see new beginnings in people who become unemployed, or who have suffered substantial financial loss. A beginning is not always easy, but it is still possible and may be necessary. These new starts can bring joy in the morning, but they often begin with a dark night of the soul of sorrow and suffering.

You may be acquainted with someone who is caught in the web of addiction. The drug of choice is almost immaterial; the experience is excruciating for both the addict and her or his family and friends. I know, because our oldest son, Matthew, has been an alcoholic for over three decades.

I say it is agonizing because there are either no new beginnings or there are many, many new beginnings, but no finishes. But, when addiction seems like the sign over the River Styx, "Abandon hope all ye who enter here," it is still possible for a new beginning to happen. God will send someone to hold open God's door for you.

We sometimes fantasize that our loved ones or friends will open the door to new beginnings, and walk right through to salvation and completeness in one step. My experience as pastor and father, is it may take a heap of door openings. Therefore, do not lose hope. Any new beginning worth our time and effort is worth a 'do-over.' God's door never closes when we fail. There is a sense in which a life-changing God-directed new beginning never ends.

As we stroll into 2018 may we 'choose the 'new way' because it is the 'better way.' These are the choices we want because we see positive change that brings glory to God, and peace to our lives. And, these changes are new beginnings that may be made whenever we are ready. We don't have to wait until our birthdates or any other 'special' days. They can begin anytime we realize we are not moving, or not moving in the proper direction.

I think St. Paul said it best: "Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal, but I press on to make it my own because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 3:12-14).

Alleluia. Amen.