

Second Sunday after Christmas 2015

“Don’t you wish you could start all over again?”, someone asks you. Perhaps you have thought of this yourself, especially with the beginning of a New Year. The whole idea of a fresh start has a strong pull on many of us — a chance to undo what we have done or to do what we have dreamed of doing.

Human relationships are often so complicated that we would like them to be uncluttered, to be innocent again. So are relationships between nations and peoples that we wish history could begin again.

Our inner thoughts that brood over our flaws and hurts born of resentment are constantly drawn to the idea of redoing our old habits of thought and behavior.

But how? The new year resolutions I make mean having to face my own accumulated set of habits—for good or ill — and sort them out.

It also helps to have a mentor, a true friend, someone who gives me a way to work on my limitations. I know it means putting that person on the spot, but hopefully their frankness will be helpful and not brutal.

Our self-examination takes place in the context of our culture and station in life. We need to take into account the surroundings, obligations and interdependence we have daily with those around us. It helps to belong to a trusted community with whom I share common goals, hopes and commitments, who themselves share their own sense of needing a fresh start.

In the months ahead, the search process will move further towards matching a potential applicant to be Trinity’s next priest. The committee will receive names, resumes, check references, background checks, and eventually interview finalists to recommend to the vestry. They will need our patience and prayers.

Meanwhile, as interim rector, I will make “straight the highway” and prepare our administration, programming, and property for the transition. There are several major changes that need to take place so that a fresh start can materialize when the new priest takes the reins of leadership.

The scripture readings today speak of gladness that God is gathering the people from a time of uneasiness and loss in exile. At times surely we have all felt feelings of hopelessness, cut off, out of step.

But God will not leave us in such a place. God desires that our lives become like a watered garden where our hearts will sing and dance.

Why, because he has chosen us before the foundation of the world to be loved, restored and redeemed.

When the story of the Wise Men is over, the Holy Family is found exiled in a far country. God sends word that now is the acceptable time to return home. We do not know how long they have been away, but now the invitation for a fresh start calls to them.

But going back does not mean returning to the same as before. They cannot go back to their former abode. The holy Child has grown precocious and energized. Joseph and Mary resolve to begin anew, bringing all the experience and skills of the past to meet the challenges of the future yet unseen.

So too must we step out towards a future, a new way of being Trinity Church. Respecting the values, achievements, and blessings of the past, we are well-trained. Yet applying what we believe and know in different times and ways will be a challenge.

Recently, Dean Raccici along with the other deans formed a study statement which faces ahead on the task of rebuilding the Church, of which many parishes are like Trinity. We all have “immediately seating available.” I quote.....

“The Congregations of the Diocese of Chicago exist to carry out the mission of the church as articulated by our Bishop: to transform lives by fostering an encounter with the dying and rising of Jesus Christ. Anchored by this calling, we are compelled to further the New Testament witness by Growing our churches, by Forming Christians, and by Changing the world.

“In earlier times it was possible to carry out this work by simply continuing to use time-honored practices. This is no longer true. While our faith continues to have power in our day no less than in the past, if our Christian communities are to flourish today, we must become leaders - at all levels of church life - who support our congregations in thinking and acting in new, creative ways.

In a culture where many options compete for people’s time and commitment, it isn't enough for us to be confident that what we offer is of ultimate value. We must develop tools that will persuade others that they will find a gift beyond measure if they join us, and we must develop new means of delivering on that promise.

Our search process has given us an assessment of who we are and what we hope to offer. In order to help implement the plan, we need to remove obstacles and remedy the ways we function.

God is never satisfied with the status quo, but calls us always to come up higher, closer, nearer to the ideals which beckon us. Yes, it is scary, hard work, but the rewards are out of this world. Amen.