



President Walton's August 2019 Message

Beginning Anew - The Power of Forgiveness



Can you remember an embarrassing moment? Personally I don't have to dig too deep. I seem to have those moments more often than I would like. These are the occasions which God often uses to humble me, make me realize my sinfulness and pride, and cause me to rely on Him. Paul addressed this in 1 Corinthians 10:12, writing, "Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall." The writer of Proverbs puts it this way in Proverbs 11:2, "When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with the humble is wisdom."

Last month I was in Atlanta for an ordination, and I had it in my mind, and even on my calendar, for 4 p.m. It was a bit unusual because it was scheduled for the Saturday before Father's Day, and in order to accommodate schedules, we had set it up this way. I had my sermon together and my plans all set. I was staying about an hour north, so I knew I would have to leave by 2 p.m. in order to get there early and be prepared to preach and then do the ordination at 4 p.m. The only problem was the service was set for 10:30 a.m. Imagine my surprise and embarrassment when at 10:25 a.m. the soon-to-be pastor texted me and asked about my estimated time of arrival. I sent a text back stating that I would be leaving at 2 p.m. and be there by 3 p.m. for the 4 p.m. service. He sent an immediate text back stating that the service was at 10:30 a.m.

My heart sank, and I honestly felt sick. I couldn't believe I missed this important fact! Fortunately, the Circuit Visitor was present and was able to step in, and one of the brothers volunteered to preach, and I am told he did an outstanding job. I was truly grateful to these men for their willingness to cover over my error!

Later that afternoon I contacted the pastor, now fully ordained, and I humbly apologized for my mistake. He laughed and said it was all fine, that he forgave me, and thanked me for the great story which he could now share. It certainly wasn't the end of the world, but it was a powerful reminder to me of how we often fail our God. Yet, in His infinite mercy and grace, He extends His forgiveness in an even more powerful way to each of us. He is able to reach into the darkness of our sin and the shame that often comes with it, to bring the light of Jesus to shine on us.

Each time we sin, if we come to Him confessing our sins, Jesus reminds us of the price He already paid for our forgiveness. His suffering, death and resurrection took the penalty of our sin and destroyed it. It wasn't because we deserved it or somehow earned it, but totally as an act of His grace and love for each of us.



As His forgiven children we are now able to start again. In fact, Jesus is all about second chances. Through His love we are able to begin anew. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:17, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” Each day, as we come to Jesus, remembering our baptism, we have a new beginning!

August, for me, is a season of new beginnings. The new school year is right around the corner, and with it come a host of other activities. While the season is often a time when people get back into the “routine” of life, it can also be a time to stand on the power of the forgiveness of Jesus and start new! What is Jesus calling you to in this season of life? How can He use the unique gifts and talents He’s placed within you to serve Him and to strengthen His kingdom?

Each of us have those moments of regret and embarrassment, It’s simply part of life and shouldn’t stop us from stepping up and out to answer His call. The new life that Jesus offers us doesn’t make us immune from them, rather it enables us to deal with these situations in a new way. We are forgiven and free, and this is what motivates mission in our hearts. When we have experienced the power of forgiveness we want to share it with others. This is the way good news works! And in Jesus we have such good news to share!

Our commitment to sharing this good news is why we are working to plant a minimum of two new ministries in each of the five regions for the next few years, and hopefully beyond that. It is an opportunity to see others experience the love and forgiveness of Jesus. In a day when many lament the decline of the church, the only real solution is each of us taking seriously the direction of Jesus to go and make disciples of all nations. We hold the power to make a difference, and that power is one of choice. You choose whether you will obey the call of Jesus or not. The impact isn’t only on you and your faith life. It also impacts the souls of those God desires to reach through you sharing His love in the world.



People often ask me what can be done to change the course that the church in our day seems to be on. It begins with recognizing the church is not a building, but God’s people, called, forgiven, redeemed, cleansed and sent into the world to share the love of Jesus and the hope that He gives us. We are the only ones who can make a difference, and Jesus is counting on us. At times that is a scary thought.

Recently I was at the LCMS National Youth Gathering in Minneapolis, Minnesota. There were more than 25,000 youth from all across the United States and beyond, gathered to experience the Real, Present, God! What I experienced, as I have in the past, is that we have young men and women who truly love Jesus. I can’t imagine that everyone would love the worship setting for this event, but no one could argue with the sheer joy and energy that abounded in the stadium. I think our youth often wonder why their worship experience can’t always be so energized with people excited about their faith in Jesus. It can be, you know!

Reading through Jesus’ words to the seven churches beginning in Revelation 2, I can’t help thinking that many Christians have become like the Church in Ephesus, we have “abandoned the love you had at first.” It’s so easy to take our faith for granted and to live as if it didn’t really matter. Many live out their faith in Jesus as if how we live doesn’t really matter. They have become so much like the “popular culture” their hunger for living for Jesus often lacks passion. Jesus’ call to the Ephesians was to repentance. This is also

His call to us. Think back to the excitement you experienced when you first understood that Jesus was your Savior. Jesus calls us to live with that joy and excitement every day.

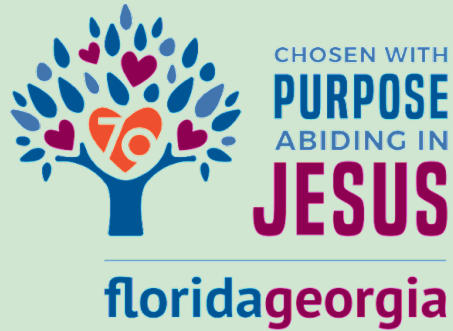
In Revelations Jesus addressed each of the seven churches, pointing to their faults, while also encouraging them. When He finally gets to the Church of Laodicea, He calls them out as “lukewarm people,” whom Jesus wants to spit out of His mouth. It’s a pretty graphic image that we should not forget. At the same time, my prayer is, may that never be us! May each of us heed His call to repentance, and take serious His desire for us to passionately and joyfully make disciples. Jesus says, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to Him and eat with Him, and he with Me.”

Jesus is knocking on the door. He’s reminding us that in Him we are new creations. He has forgiven and redeemed us, but with great purpose. We are now His representatives in the world. It’s time to repent and begin anew. Let the embarrassment and failure disappear. The blood of Jesus has cleansed us! Now is an opportunity to start something new and lasting for Jesus, so that others might know His grace. You are His forgiven child, His new creation, created with great purpose. May these be days of discovery for you, as you make a new beginning.

In His peace,

Greg

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UPCOMING EVENTS:

- [70th Anniversary Challenge](#)
- [Pastors Conference - Sept. 23-25](#)
- [Educators Conference - Sept 25 - 27](#)