

### **Every End is a New Beginning**

According to St. Paul, how is a Christian church supposed to operate? Paul says: “in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love;”

There have been quite a few times now when I have started a new pastorate. Each start has had an end. In my experience beginnings are hard and endings are hard, but there is a key to handling these situations. There has been always something that got me and the congregation through, through the good times, and the hard times. One thing stood out: it was kindness every time.

At Knox we are starting a Random Acts of kindness group. Let me tell you a little about a Ted talk that I heard.

Mark Kelly did the Ted Talk. His subject was kindness. Every day Mark used to run by a homeless man. Mark was on his way to work and just passed by. But one day Mark stopped and asked the man if there was anything he could do for him? The man asked for a coffee and a snack. Mark got it for him and the man thanked him. What took Mark by surprise was that he felt wonderful after doing this.

With a little research he discovered that the body releases serotonin and the neurotransmitter oxytocin in response to acts

of kindness. Whether it was the giver or receiver didn't matter. These hormones counter the stress that releases unhealthy cortisol into our systems.

So, he asked these questions to his audience. "Do you want to feel happier, be better physically and do you want to live longer? Then do one act of kindness every day."

He started a group at his office to do Random Acts of Kindness—the RAK group. They started with a jar with folk's names in it. When you came into the office you picked out a name and did an act of kindness for that person. Could be anything like food or drink or opening a door for someone, carrying something heavy for someone...One girl had her bike stolen. The office got together and bought her a new bike. She was overwhelmed and bust into tears of joy.

- Mark continued his own random acts of kindness. He learned that homeless people often need toothpaste, socks or a blanket. He saw a man with socks on with the toes all out. So Mark stopped and gave him a little care package he had prepared and watched the man put on the new pair of socks. Again, he was surprised by how good he felt doing this. In other words, our bodies are made to give and receive kindness and that is why St. Paul in Ministry emphasized the importance of kindness in handling difficult situations.

Scott Peck once wrote something rather profound, applicable for these times we are living in. He said "Once we truly know that life is difficult — once we truly understand and accept that — then **life is no**

**longer difficult.** Because once it is accepted, the fact that life is difficult no longer matters.”

Wow! In other words, difficulty is NORMAL in ministry or any other occupation in which we get involved. That is why kindness is necessary.

I was watching the Netflix movie called Wonder. There is a quote in that movie which I love: **“Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle.”**

When we get a new job or situation, we never know what battles people are facing. That battle, whatever it is, when added to all the new challenges, can lead to stress. That is true for us or for them when they encounter us, as employer or employee. That is one reason beginnings and endings are hard.

The Biblical story of Joseph is about endings and new beginnings. Scripture says that when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe...and took him and threw him into a pit.” Joseph no doubt thought that was the end. But no, a new beginning took place. Sold into slavery to traders going by, Joseph was taken to Egypt. He did well in a new position, but then Potiphar’s wife did him in and he went to jail. He was stuck in prison for awhile until the Pharaoh’s Butler remembered that Joseph was good at interpreting dreams. Joseph, released from prison impressed the Pharaoh and Scripture says: “And Pharaoh said to Joseph” ‘See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt.’

Removing his signet ring from his hand, he arrayed him in garments of fine linen, and put a gold chain around his neck. He had him ride in the chariot of his second in command and they cried out in front of him ‘Bow the knee!’

What a new beginning that was for a former slave...

One of the very hardest things to do in life is to start all over again. I know. I’ve been through it and I have counselled lots of people who

have come to an end. It might be the end of a job, the end of a marriage, the end of a relationship, the death of a loved one and suddenly you find yourself starting all over again. And it's hard!

I have learned however that it is always appropriate to be in touch with one's feelings. Its okay to be sad at the end of some thing that you loved to do. And when someone passes away, tears and hugs can help so much to deaden the pain.

But I also know that new beginnings can be very hard too.

I watched a friend whose company folded. He had severance pay. He counted on that for awhile, bought himself a new sound system and a new car. But slowly the money began to run out and he still didn't have a job. He would interview time and time again and be rejected. They said, (behind his back of course), that he was too old. Finally, he got a job. Not what he wanted at all!

Ministers are privileged to counsel people at the hinge points of their lives. Suddenly a life-long relationship comes to an end. The widow or widower is stunned by the loss of a life partner, going through deep grief, anger, depression, sometimes guilt and despair. The emotion of the loss passes over them in waves.

The weekends are hard, the holidays which were always wonderful times with the family, become very difficult. When Thanksgiving comes we ask "Do I put in a Thanksgiving turkey or not?" Or at Christmas time "Do I put up the lights this year? Bill always did that. I don't think I could manage that. I won't try this year." And the lights remain in the basement storage.

Or, have you ever been deeply in love with someone and then been rejected? You call them up on the phone- the voice has changed now-gone colder and soon your calls left on the answering machine are not answered. Then you see your lover walking down the street, arm in arm with someone new and then you know for sure that it is all over.

Have you ever asked why ends are so painful for us?

If the end is painful, it is frequently because we've got a big investment in the relationship and a lot to lose. If we have worked for a company happily for fifteen years and then the job is terminated, you lose not only the salary, the security, the friendships, but also the whole routine of your life.

It's the same with the loss of a spouse: there is the loss of love and affection, loss of security, loss of the friends who you related to as a couple only, and there is often a loss of optimism and the loss of the feeling that all is right with the world.

And we don't like to lose these things.

There is also the temptation to become bitter, negative and cynical, and if we are wounded, to nurse the wound.

If you have ever lost a pet you know just how hard it is. One woman said to me "I shall never have another cat again. I just can't stand it when they die!" She was afraid to begin again.

One of the challenges with beginning again is the difficulty of breaking inertia so that we can get going. I can remember at one point in my life having 53 job interviews and still coming up with nothing. I had just graduated from university. One day I sat myself down and said "David, what job can you get for sure?"

For years I had delivered fish for the summer. So, I went back to driving a fish truck. It was the best thing I could have done because I discovered a principle that I wish to share with you today.

A lot of executives get fired or downsized out of a job when they are at the very top of their professions. The saying is: "The closer you are to the top, the closer you are to the door." I discover that there are a couple of things that frequently happen. Some execs get an even better job.

About a third however remain unemployed. Why? They refuse to take lesser jobs with smaller pay. The jobs are beneath them. These people never discover the principle I am going to share with you.

Are you discouraged today?

Starting today, why not begin a random acts of kindness program for yourself? It will give you hope...**Doing something for others is a great way out of despair!**

Pick up the phone and make that call you are afraid to make. Get the information you need. Decide to begin again. Revise your resume. Get your name out there! Ask for help from your friends with your particular challenge.

It is absolutely true that this Sunday is the first day of the rest of your life. You simply have no idea what surprises await you around the corner.

The Bible is chock full of stories of people who, when faced with an end, began again.

Look at Moses. He was supposed to die under an Egyptian edict, because he was a Hebrew child. But his mother was creative and her strategy was an ark of bull rushes into which she laid her precious little boy. She was at the far end, but this was worth trying. She decided that she would place the child in the bull rushes where Pharaoh's daughter came to bathe, and suddenly young Moses was adopted into royalty.

But it doesn't stop there. Much later as a young man Moses killed an Egyptian who was taking it out on a Hebrew slave and in a passionate moment of anger, Moses killed the Egyptian. Then Moses fled for his life and left for the desert to mind sheep. Surely this was the end with no possibility for a new beginning? "Downhill from here!" he no doubt thought.

But no, a burning bush stopped him in his tracks and God called him to reconsider his life. And Moses eventually delivered his people out of slavery in Egypt. Moses last view of life was again of a new beginning. He saw the promised land just as centuries later did Martin Luther King Jr., when he said just before he died “I have seen the promised land.” Neither went into that new beginning...

In the New Testament Jesus’ father Joseph had enormous expectations. He was going to get married. Then came the news. He discovered that his bride to be was pregnant, and not with his child. Imagine, the wedding invitations are all out and you discover that your bride, whom you love more than anyone else in the world, has been unfaithful to you.

For it wasn’t then, like it is today, for Joseph. Sleeping around today is quite common. In Joseph’s day, sleeping around was punishable with death. In Joseph’s mind someone had beaten him to the marriage bed and he was heartbroken. In fact, Joseph had come to the end.

Being a just man, he knew the relationship was over. So, he decided to do the kind thing and put Mary away privately.

So, Joseph thought... this is the end.

But overnight, out of the blue, a new beginning came. He had a dream where an angel said “Don’t be afraid to take Mary home as your wife. It is by the Holy Spirit that she has conceived this child. She will bear a son, and you shall give him the name Jesus for he will save his people from their sins.”

Now...Joseph had a real problem! Was he was supposed to believe, against everything that is natural, that his wife to be was faithful, a virgin and pregnant? How do you do that?

Joseph woke up the next morning after the dream to think about it all. There was this very real dream... this thin thread of hope...He decided,

against the odds of probability, to go on with the marriage, invest in the pregnancy and start all over again!

So, Joseph had to discover our sermon theme of the day: **Every end is a new beginning.**

He became the adopting father of the One who more than anyone has changed the history of the world. He became, with this new beginning, the right man at the right time to be the adoptive father of the One whose parables still shine down to us from the future, for as yet we do not love our enemies...

Joseph nurtured the One who instead of religion brought good news—that God is, that God loves, that there is life after this life, that there is forgiveness no matter what we have done; that one day there will be a joyful coming together of the Creator and all things bright and beautiful and all creatures great and small; that there is a heaven full of infinite, irrepressible hope, and everlasting, ever renewing possibilities.

Joseph would have known none of this, if he had not begun all over again,

So he discovered what our faith teaches us: *Every end is a new beginning, and this truth spans the whole of life and death.*

Today is my last Sunday as your Interim Minister. It has been a great joy for me to return to Knox. Knox is making a new beginning and I believe in that new beginning.

What has got me through at Knox? Your kindness, your love and your support. The session has been great. The interim moderators have been supportive of a new beginning. The leadership at Knox is outstanding. The search team has worked hard and they are excited at the coming of Kelli Berkner and her family.

Knox is stronger today than it has been. Things are sorted out. The finances are solid. There is a good relationship with BMI. We have



started small groups knowing that is the way of the future. I have checked all the boxes I could in the time given. My job is done.

I want you to know that it is okay to feel sad. I do...

But, I also know now, both for me and for you, that **we stand in the field of all possibilities**. You have a permanent pastor now. Who knows where you will go together?

I don't know what I will do next either. So, all possibilities are still open and that is very exciting.

Gordon B. Peterson has written a book called 12 rules for life. In the book he describes what his daughter endured after she got Juvenile Rheumatoid arthritis.

Soon Mikhaila's life became hard. She had many interventions but she still deteriorated. Side effects came. Suffering increased. But after a happy overdose mistake of a new drug, Mikhaila's body responded and she appeared to be fixed. Soon she was zipping around playing little league soccer. For a few years she became symptom free... but then symptoms came back in two joints. This meant that she hadn't grown out of it. The news demolished her. By grade eleven her hip started to deteriorate badly. It was ominous news. Then her hip locked up. The femur appeared dead. Was this to be the end of her active life?

Mikhaila's nights were now full of pain. Soon Tylenol three was insufficient and opiates were employed. In May of the year her hip was replaced.

But interestingly, the bone hadn't died. Once again, her hopes lifted. She progressed for awhile but then her ankle began to disintegrate. Her doctors wanted to fuse the bones into one piece. But, that would have caused the smaller bones in her foot to deteriorate- not a solution for a teen!

The family insisted on an artificial replacement although the tech was new.

The pain was simply not manageable. Mikhaila had reached her breaking point. She was at the far end. Finally, the family found a surgeon in Vancouver and he replaced the ankle. Post surgery she was in absolute agony. Her foot was mispositioned.

One of her surgeons told her that her artificial ankle would now have to be removed and her ankle fused. Amputation lay down that road. She had been in pain now for eight years... Surely it was basically over. She was done!

But then something happened which gave her a new beginning.

She happened upon a physiotherapist. He was a large, powerful and kind man and a very attentive person. He had specialized in ankles in the UK in London.

After consulting with her, he asked her if she was willing to move her foot back and forth while he compressed the joint? Desperate, she agreed.

He placed his large, powerful, kindly hands around her ankle and compressed it for forty seconds while Mikhaila moved her foot back and forth.

Suddenly a mispositioned bone slipped back where it belonged. Her pain disappeared! She was not one for crying in front of medical personnel, but this time she did, and burst into grateful tears. Her knee straightened up.

Now she can walk long distances and traipses around in her bare feet. The calf muscle in her leg has grown back. She has more flexion in the artificial joint. She is now married and has a baby girl called Elizabeth after her father's departed mother.

All this came about when *the right person appeared at the right time* and put his arms around that ankle.

**In your life have you met the right person who can help you?**

Finally, I think it all comes down to this. When we face an end and a new beginning we can do one of two things: Either we can go it alone or we can ask for God's help. We can tune into the way that God made us. We are meant to be kind. When we forget that our lives go sideways.

St Paul knew this deeply and it gave him incredible resolve so that he could face any end and any beginning. That is why he taught congregations to move forward: **in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God;**

**My message to you the congregation of Knox is this: In purity, understanding, patience and kindness** may you go forward into the next chapter knowing that: the love of God is broader

Than the measures of man's mind  
And the heart of the Eternal  
Is most wonderfully kind.

Amen

