

- To all the blessed people who are reading these words, Greetings:

SCRIPTURE:

2 Corinthians 5:17 (MSG) – Larger reading: 2 Corinthians 5:11-21

“Now we look inside, and what we see is that anyone united with the Messiah gets a fresh start, is created new. The old life is gone; a new life burgeons! Look at it!”

STORY: *as told by Jackson Wilcox*

Frank Horne, the great track star, once gave the following advice about living and running a race: “Live as I have taught you, boy. It’s a short dash. Dig your starting holes deep and firm; lurch out of them into the straightaway with all the power that is in you; look straight ahead to the finish line; think only of the goal. Run straight, run high, run hard. Save nothing and finish with an ecstatic burst that carries you hurtling through the tapes to victory.”

OBSERVATION:

While in Gainesville a participant with Up With People stayed with us. She introduced the family to a very addictive electric hand-held version of YAHTZEE. We had been playing the board version for a number of years, but we were not aware of the individual hand-held version until then. We liked it so much that we now have two of them floating around the house. What is so marvelous about the hand-held version is the little button titled: NEW GAME. If you do not like the way the computer is rolling the dice and the scoring isn’t going quite like the way you would desire it to go ... just press NEW GAME and presto, you get to start again without being penalized. I have a tendency to press that magical button more times than I would really care to admit.

In the game of golf I understand that there is a particular rule that some golfers use called a mulligan – a second chance to get it right ... or as a preacher in Florida would call out, “That’s a do-over!” as he picked up his ball and went back to the tee. Since I am not a golfer I’m not sure if that is in the PGA rulebook or even accepted within polite circles of golfers, but this would be one rule that I would have to insist on if I ever took up the game.

Wouldn’t it be great if in our life we had a “new life” button or that we could simply call out “that’s a do-over or mulligan” and go back to the beginning of a particular event until we got it right ... especially when we are not running at our best, didn’t get a good start, failed to keep our eyes on the finish line, allowed our minds to wander from the goal? There is an old beer commercial that featured a time machine where this one particular character keeps coming through the apartment, punches in certain coordinates of time and date in the future in a desperate attempt to get the future correct.

If it be something in our past or something that we might be hopeful of in our future we needn't worry because as God declares in holy writ that our "old life is gone ... a new life has begun." Within the mindset of God what is past is past and it is forgotten ... what is in the future is in God's hands and God's hands alone ... we are to live free in the now with rejoicing ... "finish(ing) with an ecstatic burst that carries you hurtling through the tapes to victory."

We have a most difficult time forgiving ourselves and/or others. We hold onto grudges and hurts. It is particularly difficult ... to simply let go ... it is something that I work at almost daily. A therapist once shared with me that forgiving is not forgetting because those events in the past helped shape you into the person you are today. What isn't healthy is nursing those grudges and hurts as if they had taken place just yesterday. He went on to share that it is okay not to want to be in the presence of someone who has hurt you deeply, but do be aware of why you are experiencing those feelings so that with the help of God and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit it becomes possible to built a healthy and wholesome reality for yourself ... thus, moving on.

Our sense of being in a state of perpetual "unforgiveness" can be a rather heavy burden to continue to try to carry around. God has stated that that isn't necessary. In Matthew 11:28 Jesus states: "Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest." (MSG) There in lies our "new life" button, our do-over chance, our unlimited supply of mulligan's. God is a God of second chances ... and third chances ... and fourth chances ... and a thousand and one other chances. There is an unlimited supply of "second chances" offered by the throne of Heaven. They are a part of God's unbelievable grace.

QUOTE:

"Karl Menninger, the famed psychiatrist, once said that if he could convince the patients in psychiatric hospitals that their sins were forgiven, 75 percent of them could walk out the next day!" - Today in the Word

PRAYER:

Gracious and forgiving God, when someone has come along and shattered our life, scattered all the pieces to our life's puzzle, spoke ill of us, and sought to do us damage ... help us to become stronger. Lead us to the threshold of forgiveness. And then assist us in putting our life back together. In the name of the great healer, Jesus Christ himself. Amen

And the faith journey continues, Pastor Jim

Jmartin450@tampabay.rr.com

386-795-5323

As you participate in today's worship experience think about the walls that close others out and close you in. Only by the power of the Holy Spirit and in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ can they come tumbling down.
