

The Power Points of Life  
"The Power to Begin Again"  
Acts 3:12-19

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Being married to a public school teacher, I have always been fond of this old poem:

He came to my desk with quivering lips,  
The lesson was done.  
Dear Teacher, "I want a new sheet," he said,  
"I spoiled this one."  
I took the old sheet, stained and blotted and gave  
him a new one, all unspotted,  
And into his sad eyes smiled, "Do better now my  
child."

I came to God with a quivering soul  
The old life was done.  
Dear Father, "Have you a new life for me?  
I spoiled this one."  
He took the old life, stained and blotted and gave me  
a new one, all unspotted,  
And into my sad heart smiled, "Do better now my  
child."

The power to begin again! That's what I want us to think about today. It was the topic of Peter's sermon on Solomon's porch, after a crippled man started walking, jumping and praising God. Peter says to the crowd that gathered, "*In Jesus Christ, there is new life for you. This is what you have to do.*" Peter offered three steps to embrace it.

**RENOUNCE THE SPIRITUAL FORCES OF WICKEDNESS:**

*"The power of evil killed the author of life and you went along with it. Surely you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders,"* says Peter.

James Russell Lowell wrote:

"Once to every man and nation comes a moment to  
decide,  
In the strife of truth with falsehood, for the good or  
evil side."

Billy Graham once said, "The wars among the nations of the earth are mere popgun affairs compared to the fierceness of battle in the spiritual world." The Apostle Paul said that he had fought a good fight. You get a sense that it was a battle all the way. He said his battle was against, "*The powers of darkness and the spiritual forces of evil in heavenly places.*" And the choice goes on forever, 'twixt the darkness and the light. Which side are you on?

C.S. Lewis's most interesting book is the one entitled Screwtape Letters. It is the advice of Screwtape, the major devil, to his nephew Wormwood, on how to win back a recent convert to Christianity. "Don't try major temptations of the flesh;" advises Screwtape, "he's prepared to resist them. Get him discouraged. Wear him out doing church work. Help him become friends with superficial Christians who are highly skeptical about everything. Get him on the slippery, sliding, slope of doubt and mistrust. We'll have him back in no time." The spiritual forces of evil are everywhere around.

Dan Brown, author of the best-selling book and soon to be movie The Da Vinci Code, personally admits that he was amazed that his fictional book sold forty million copies. The Da Vinci Code is fiction, even though Brown erroneously claims it is based on facts, part of which he has been sued for. The murder mystery that follows informs us that almost everything our fathers' taught us about Jesus Christ is false. According to Mr. Brown, "The Church is murderous and evil, the Bible is a hoax, Jesus never claimed to be divine, but was a mere mortal married to Mary Magdalene whose bones compose the Holy Grail because she bore the child of Jesus, whose descendents are still among us today." My advice is save your money, skip the movie, and let not the Church be a pawn for free advertisement. The spiritual forces of wickedness are always here. There's nothing you can do about this. In fact, Dan Brown's sources date back to Narcissism in the first century which was proved to be a heresy and a lot he had to do in copying a book in 1982. The spiritual forces of wickedness - Peter says, "*Renounce them.*"

### **REPENT AND TURN TO GOD SO THAT YOUR SINS CAN BE WIPED OUT.**

We are not likely to reach our desired destination by traveling faster in the wrong direction. Sometimes the best thing we can do is stop and turn around.

Several years ago I was coming home from a fast trip to Lake Junaluska, North Carolina when I ran into a horrific traffic jam at the tunnels on I-40 outside Knoxville. Not known to be a patient driver, I whipped off the interstate at the closest exit under the grandiose notion that I could find my way through the Smokey Mountains without even a map to guide me. Well, you guessed it; I was quickly lost. The two lane blacktop road became a one lane road that evolved into a gravel road that soon became more dirt than gravel. Sandy says, "I think you are lost"— a totally unnecessary observation under the circumstances.

As the road came to an end, I realized I was next to a river. A single car was parked on the bank. I stepped up on the bank and said to the lonely fisherman sitting there, "Catching anything?" He took one look at my white pants and black loafers and replied, "You're lost, ain't ya?" "I guess I am," I confessed, "Could you help me find my way out?" Without cracking a smile, the fisherman stood up and said, "Turn around. Go back to that bridge you crossed, take the first road to the right and then every time the road forks, keep turning right. You'll eventually get to Pigeon Forge." Guess what? He was right.

God invented repentance for imperfect people. If you always make the right choices, do the right thing, never waiver, never fail, then you have no need for repentance. It's the rest of us that need to repent and turn to God. If we miss the mark of God's high calling and find ourselves on dead-end roads, repentance is for us.

Will Willimon tells about visiting with a professor at Duke Medical School who said, "I give thanks to God every day that I am Lutheran—not just any Lutheran, but a Missouri Synod Lutheran. We are really big on sin. Every morning when I walk toward the medical school with all its grandiosity, I say, a lot of good things are going to happen here today. While we are busy helping people there will be some mistakes. People will be overlooked. I say, Lord forgive us." Will said that he told the doc, "You mean you are thankful for that?" He replied, "Of course, I am. I meet a lot of people who are not Lutheran, not religious at all. They think they have to get everything right. When they don't, they have no place to go." Oh, what a relief it is to know we can repent. Repentance belongs to those of us who believe in another chance.

**REFRESH YOUR SOUL.** *"That times of refreshing may come from the Lord."*

In this age of gourmet coffees and exotic pastries, I find myself going to meetings just for the food and drink. A cup of coffee is no longer just a cup of coffee. Refreshment services have risen to a whole new level. Breaks can wake you up, pick you up, energize your movement, invigorate your spirit, and send you soaring to new highs. At least that's what refreshment companies advertise. I want that kind of coffee break.

There are times when I could use a spiritual lift like that. In a Jim Davis cartoon, Garfield the cat is lying in his box trying to coax himself into getting up. "It's time to spring into action," says Garfield to himself. But as his paw pounds the ground the rest of him stays put. Finally, in defeat Garfield laments, "The spirit is willing, but the springer is weak!" Sometimes my soul has a weak springer. How about you? I could use some refreshment in my soul.

Jesus said, *"If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and find drink."* If you are weary, come to Jesus and find rest. The water that Jesus gives becomes a spring of water, welling up to eternal life. They, who drink this spiritual water, will never thirst again.

Though my weary steps may falter,  
and my soul a thirst may be,  
Gushing from the rock before me,  
Lo! A spring of joy I see.  
Let it be; let it be.

Here in this service of Holy Communion, let us renounce the forces of wickedness, repent of our sins, and find refreshment for our souls.

Amen.