

"We've been born anew..."

I Peter 1:3

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On September 3, 1966, something happened in Sweden that is a parable of what can happen to a life, your life and mine. On that date an historic change happened in Sweden.

The Swedes had always driven their autos on the left side of the road. But on that day in 1966 they switched to the right side, all at once. Here is how it was done: On the appointed day, at the appointed hour and minute, all traffic stopped. For fifteen minutes every vehicle remained where it was. Thru out the nation, not a wheel turned. There immoblie on the road, each motorist sat quietly in the driver's seat - contemplating, considering, reflecting, re-adjusting himself. Each must realize the implications of what he was doing; the driving habit of a lifetime must be broken, the change must be made at this present moment and it must be complete. There must be no absent minded driving. THINK - until a new driving habit is formed, never forget to remember, never slip back, never revert to the old way. In fifteen minutes each driver must reverse the direction of a lifetime, and the reversal must be indelible, for the rest of life - even when very tired, or sleepy, or preoccupied. There, for fifteen minutes, everything was at a standstill. Then the time past, and motors started, wheels turned and each vehicle crossed to the other side, and traffic went on. Every one stopped in order to start over, and this the

whole nation did.

(2)

And when I read that in the news, I thought, this is life . . . one of the best illustration which points to the meaning of Christian conversion that I know of. I thought of Saul going along the road to Damascus, bitter, bigoted, violent - but stopped in order to start over again. And what a start it was. I thought of how he later said: "I am apprehended of Christ". Apprehended means stopped, arrested. Paul was stopped, and the whole world has been profoundly affected by his new beginning..

I thought of Mary Magdalene, of that nameless woman prostrate on the dusty road outside Jerusalem, of Peter weeping as Jesus passed by going up Calvary. And I remembered something that Paul had said: "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away; behold; the new has come". Or of the Psalmist: "As far as the east is from the west, as far does he remove our transgressions from us". And I knew that Christ came to meet us at the place of the cross, to stop us there, that from there we might start over.

Peter says that "We have been born anew". He uses "we" but surely that is a personal testimony.

As I read that news account I thought of people I knew, I thought of myself . . . when back in my teen years, I  
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stopped, I thought, I readjusted, and began anew. (3)

Our meeting with Christ at the cross is not pre-scheduled. Christ is always there and the time is whenever we are ready. It is the stop of repentance, and the go of forgiveness - anyday, anywhere. And many people have discovered what this stop means. All your lifetime you have traveled a certain road which brought you to this point . . . with sets of attitudes, habits, patterns. You were driving on one side of the road; and now you stop; here at the cross...you think, you readjust, you change . . . and for the rest of your life you drive on the other side with new attitudes, new life. Thus, in this moment, in this place, at the cross you start over.

The cross is a place of starting over; but there is something about the cross which provides us with something to go on to. The matchless love which we see overflowing from the cross may move us to stop and cut loose from the past; but it is the majestic power overflowing from the resurrection which gives us something to reach for and to grasp and to hold in hope and incentive to go on.

It was true for the early friends of our Lord. They did not understand, but the power of the resurrection gave them the strength to start anew . . . and they did.

Of course, starting over is <sup>not</sup> always easy; It can be a big problem: how can we untangle the snarls of the past, undo

the snarls; how can we turn the calendar back? We can't  
and the wonderful thing is. . . we don't have to. The import-  
ant thing is this: We do not have to. (4)

Starting over with Christ is from where you are, not from  
where you were

(story about getting to Dublin "mr if I were going  
to Dublin, I wouldn't start from here)

Well, we do start from here. This is where we are. If  
you are looking for a place to start over again, this is the  
only place to look. Not yesterday, that chance is gone; not  
tomorrow, that hasn't, indeed may not, come. Here and now  
- that is where the living Christ is, and this side of the  
resurrection . . . living.

In the third <sup>chapter</sup> ~~chapter~~ of John, Nicodemus says: "How can a  
man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into  
his mother's womb and be born". In its meaning Jesus'  
reply was this: "You can be born from where you are, you  
don't have to go back to your mother's womb; you don't have  
to go back to any time and place".

And we don't either. The gospel is current, it is al-  
ways up-to-date as each new dawn. Whenever, wherever it is  
we stand when we say "here am I", Christ replies "I am with  
you".

Jesus gave many people the chance to start over. There  
was a blind man people considered a nuisance. Jesus said  
"big bring him here" and he released the man from his  
prison of blindness and gave him forgiveness, too.



And there was a lame man..people said he was a sinner and unworthy. But Jesus said to him: "Be whole, get up and walk And he did . . and walked out into a new life (5)

But that, and much more, was before Calvary . . when Jesus was there. But he is here now, with us, with his disciples of our time. He is here, this side of Calvary, and this side of Easter; he has come thru both those for us to be with us where we are. And he is forever giving to each of us another chance, a chance to be born anew, a chance to start from where we are.

Robert Goodrich tells about a time he heard at a conference of state governors. One of the governors asked one of the conference speakers: "What do you think is the greatest thing in the world?" The speaker hesitated, then turned the question back to the governor: "What do you think And this state governor, who had weathered some storms said: "I think the greatest thing in the world is that we can walk away from yesterday." We can indeed, we can walk away from any yesterday, and day . . there is always and always another chance.

In a book called Horns and Halos in Human Nature, the late Wallace Hamilton paid his respects to the people who say: "You just can't change human nature". Hamilton said: There is more downright blasphemy in that sentence than in a tent full of top sergeants. There is moer atheism in that attitude than in all the professed godliness of Russia"

And that's true.. The "good news" isn't good enough unless it offers the power to set us free from encumbering yesterdays, and gives us a chance to move inot a free tomorrow. You need not worry about the Christian gospel, at this point...it measures up gloriously.

A young woamn who had lost her way in the moral wilderne

of this world, encountered Christ, accepted him and received him as Lord of her life. Someone asked her: "How do you feel?" Her reply: "I feel so new." "As far as the east is from the west, so far has God removed our transgressions from us" How far is that? How far is the east from the west....far enough, you can be assured, that we can start over without their burden. (6)

There on that first Easter morning. Peter believing Jesus was dead, was depressed and distressed. It seemed to him that the great venture was over, that the great hope had faded as it was crucified. But then the report came from the burial ground that something had happened...and he came running . . and no one could ever convince him that this wasn't his chance to start over.

Nobody would have believed when Saul of Tarsus set out from Jerusalem to arrest the Christians at Damascus, that before he reached the city he would have his moment of starting over. But he did..because he met Christ in the way. What we are saying is this: No matter how far you have gone down the road to anywhere, whenever you really meet Christ, this is your place of starting over.

And here at this place you can drop whatever has weighed you down, you can overcome the fears that have infested your spirit. And when comes at last that parting time when you must leave this world, your leaving is but a starting over . . and you go on.