



Carstairs-Bancroft United Church
January 11, 2022
DAILY ENCOURAGEMENT
DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC
By Rev. Maria Szabone Berces



Photo: Our Daily Bread

Beloved Carstairs Bancroft United Church Members,

Today's Inspiration in one sentence

“When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.” (Colossians 3:4)

Did You Know?

- That **Colossians** is a genuine letter of Paul is usually not disputed. In the early church, all who speak on the subject of authorship ascribe it to Paul.
- The letter is to be dated during Paul's first imprisonment in Rome, where he spent at least two years under house arrest. Most scholars agree that Colossians should be dated c. AD 60, in the same year as Ephesians and Philemon.
- Several hundred years before Paul's day, Colossae had been a leading city in Asia Minor (present-day Turkey). It was located on the Lycus River and on the great east-west trade route leading from Ephesus on the Aegean Sea to the Euphrates River. By the first century AD Colossae was diminished to a second-rate market town, which had been surpassed long before in power and importance by the neighboring towns of Laodicea and Hierapolis.
- What gave Colossae New Testament importance, however, was the fact that during Paul's three-year ministry in Ephesus, Epaphras had been converted and had carried the gospel to Colossae. The young church that was born there then became the target of heretical attack, which led to Epaphras' visit to Paul in Rome and ultimately to the penning of the Colossian letter.

(The NIV Study Bible; Colossians)

Personal Insight

We are still at the beginning of 2022, so new year resolutions might be fresh for those of us who yearn for a change, or as the writer of the devotion below put it caught “*the fresh start effect*”.

I found it especially encouraging that starting anew, or having a desirable change in our lives is not restricted to any particular or special day. It is similarly heartening that when we really want to change, to have a fresh start or a second chance, we don't have to rely on our own strength only in achieving it.

By entering the season of Epiphany (which word means “*revealing of something*,” that previously had not been seen), in Jesus we may also realize that God loves us unconditionally, and it is best shown to us through the Bethlehem Child. And it's not a mere theory, but something that we can experience in our everyday life. As the New Creed puts it: “*We are not alone.*” We just have to risk the leap of faith, and to place our whole selves - our hopes and desires; our pains and griefs; our fears and uncertainties - into God's all-powerful and loving hands. And when we do, we open our hearts to discover that “**the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard [our] hearts and [our] minds in Christ Jesus.**” (Philippians 4:7)

Grace and Peace to You All,
Rev. Maria



Fresh Start Effect

[Put] on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.

Colossians 3:10

READ Colossians 3:1–10

When Bryony turned thirty, she was sad to still be in a sales job she'd never liked. She decided it was time to stop procrastinating and find a new career. For David, New Year's Eve had him looking in the mirror vowing this would be the year he lost weight. And for James, it was watching another month pass without his angry outbursts decreasing. Next month, he promised himself, he would try harder.

If you've ever vowed to change at the start of a new month, new year, or a major birthday, you're not alone. Researchers even have a name for it: the fresh start effect. They suggest that at calendar points like these we're more prone to assess our lives and try putting our failures behind us to start over. Wanting to be better people, we long for a fresh start.

Faith in Jesus speaks powerfully to this longing, offering a vision of what our best selves can be (Colossians 3:12–14) and calling us to leave our past selves behind (vv. 5–9). It offers this change not by decisions and vows alone, but by divine power. When we believe in Jesus, we become new people, and God's Spirit works in us to make us whole (v. 10; Titus 3:5).

Receiving salvation in Jesus is the ultimate fresh start. And it doesn't need to wait for a special calendar date. Your new life can start right now. – By **Sheridan Voysey**

REFLECT & PRAY

Jesus, I give up my own plans to follow Yours. Please give me a fresh start! Amen.

How have you seen the fresh start effect at work in your life? What's stopping you from receiving God's gift of a new life now?

SCRIPTURE INSIGHT

In Colossians 2, Paul established that we've "died with Christ to the elemental spiritual forces [or basic principles] of this world" (v. 20). Then he asked these believers in Jesus, "Why do you keep on following the rules of this world" (v. 20 NLT). He'd noticed they were lapsing into a legalistic form of religion. Paul said, "These rules may seem wise because they require strong devotion . . . But they provide no help in conquering a person's evil desires" (v. 23 NLT).

In chapter 3, Paul turns our focus instead to Christ: "Set your hearts on things above, where Christ is" (v. 1). We're to "put to death . . . whatever belongs to [our] earthly nature," that is, our sinful tendencies (vv. 5, 8–9). This may well include things the world would consider "religious." Instead, we're to be guided by the Holy Spirit—the only lasting way to change our behavior. - By **Tim Gustafson**

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