

2CH Sunday at 7.30

Talks from the NSW Council of Churches

The God of second chances

Presented by David Kerr

Have you ever had the thrill and the promise of a new beginning? I've been so relieved and grateful on many occasions to have had a second chance. I think we all welcome the possibility of a new beginning.

I heard about the Police in the USA who had stopped a teen-age girl in Idaho, after complaints that a car had been seen going around her neighborhood in reverse for some time. The girl told police that her parents had let her use the car, but she had put too much mileage on it. "I was just trying to unwind some of it," she said.

I think we would all like to unwind parts of our lives. Is that true for you?

I know teachers who welcome a new year to commence with a new class. I'm aware of parents who celebrate a second or third-born – the chance to get it right this time. Some politicians long for a second chance.

Whether we are employees, students, doctors, pastors or parents, – professionals, there can be much joy in having a second chance – to do it better, to retrieve our reputation, to get it right, to restore favour, to restore faith, to restore a relationship. Today I want you to understand that the God of the Bible is the God of second chances.

Today I'm talking about new beginnings. Are there areas in your life where you would like a "fresh start"?

The Israelites wanted a "fresh start." Let me remind you of their story.

God had blazed a trail for His people, rescuing them from the cruel clutches of Pharaoh in Egypt, leading them through the Red Sea and the thirsty wilderness of the East.

Who could have forgotten the terrible plagues that God brought down on the Egyptians?

Who could have forgotten the amazing and spectacular crossing of the Red Sea and the returning deadly mass of water that drowned Pharaoh's army?

Who could have forgotten the wonderful provisions that God had organised for His people as they moved forward to the Promised Land - the amazing, powerful acts of God that showed them He was the greatest protector and faithful leader that any nation could have.

How could anyone **not** remember? Well, the Israelites successfully managed it. 40 days without Moses when was up on the mountain talking with God. 40 days without any sign of God's presence, and they started to question God's incredible track record. God's CV was impeccable. You'd think the spectacular events of the past would have been indelibly etched onto their mind. But, they wanted a visible presence, someone they could see, and they urged Aaron to make a God for them.

And so from their jewellery and ornaments, Aaron fashioned a calf. Less than 40 days after having pledged to keep the law which God had given them on Mt Sinai, they broke it by worshipping the golden calf. God was angry at their idolatry, immorality and revelry. Moses came down the mountain and in anger smashed the two tablets of stone that recorded the 10 commandments. The idol was ground down and put into their drinking water. Moses called for a decision and those that did not stand with God were cut down by the sword.

Do you feel you have let God down? Maybe in earlier years you had good relationship with Him. Did something happen that spoilt your relationship? A traumatic death, a broken relationship, the loss of a child or a loved one? Did someone in a church criticise you or say something that offended you? Or did you just slowly drift away? Maybe you don't understand how it happened. Whatever the reason, the result is that you no longer feel that God is with you. You struggle on alone in the world. You don't feel God's presence as you did in the past. You feel empty, or lack direction. You feel like you're floating along in life without any purpose. So what do you do?

What did the Israelites do?

In their case, they had openly rebelled against God and as a consequence they suffered, and then God gave instruction to Moses to lead them on to the Promised Land, but His Presence would not go with them. Then we read that Moses and the Israelites became fearful. They could not imagine life without God's presence. However, there's more to their story. And I know there can be more to your story. God is the God of second chances.

You're listening to Sunday at 7.30 and I'm David Kerr. I'm speaking about getting a fresh start with God, a second chance. There might be many things that have caused you to have a distant relationship with God. Maybe you feel that you have no connection at all.

How you get a new connection?

In the case of the Israelites, they had rebelled against the goodness and faithfulness of God. They had created a golden calf to worship and gave it the place that God should have had in their lives.

So what happened?

We read in Exodus chapter 33 that Moses appealed to his good track record with God and interceded for his people. The Old Testament records that God will look for someone who is faithful to Him and will hear their prayers, their requests. The Bible teaches that the prayer of someone who is right with God can achieve much. Moses called out to God not to desert His people.

God respected the good relationship he had with Moses and heard his prayer not to destroy or abandon his people. He reassured Moses that His presence would continue with him and the people. God is the God of second chances.

If you feel God has gone out of your life for whatever the reason, there is always the possibility of a new beginning.

What a great asset it is to have someone barrack on our behalf. Someone who will go into bat for us. Someone to intercede when the cause appears hopeless.

When God seems distant, and we feel alone – deserted, we can go down, feel depressed, guilty, sad and angry. If you are in that space now, is there someone you know, whom you can trust, a person of faith who understands you, who can support you? Who will pray for you - even though you yourself don't feel like praying and don't want to pray? They will. They can walk beside you through the valley.

Moses did that for his people – the Israelites. He went into bat for them and God heard his request. The people renewed their trust in God and God renewed his covenant with His people. The Israelites were given a second chance, a new beginning and they were the stronger for it. It gave them the courage and strength to move on into the land that God had promised them.

What are times of trauma for us can be a strength in the future.

Somebody asked Winston Churchill one time, "What most prepared you to lead Great Britain through World War II?" For a period of time, Great Britain stood virtually alone against Nazi Germany as it dominated the Western World.

This was Churchill's response: "It was the time I repeated a class in grade school."

The questioner said, "You mean you flunked a grade?"

Churchill said, "I never flunked in my life. I was given a second opportunity to get it right."

For Churchill it was like a second chance. Do you need a second chance - a new beginning?

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The Israelites on their journey to the Promised Land rebelled against God by creating a false God in the form of a golden calf and attributed to it all that God had done for them in rescuing them from their slavery in Egypt. Moses interceded with God on their behalf and so God gave them a second chance – a new beginning.

God renewed his covenant, his agreement with his people. Just when you think Israelites are doomed for all time, God gives them another chance. He gives us another chance too.

The sign that God has given us another chance is called the New Covenant – the New Agreement. His Presence is with us through His Holy Spirit. When we belong to God's family, God's spirit lives within us, guides and directs us. Some of us still long for signs and wonders to confirm God's presence. Jesus had a word about this to his disciples who had seen him in action and witnessed his miracles. Jesus said, "You have seen me and believed in me. Blessed are those who haven't seen and yet believe."

Australia originally was for many, the land of new beginnings.

The tradition of noticing 26 January began early in the nineteenth century with Sydney almanacs referring to First Landing Day or Foundation Day. That was the day in 1788 Captain Arthur Phillip, commander of the First Fleet of eleven convict ships from Great Britain and the first governor of New South Wales, arrived at Sydney Cove. The raising of the Union Jack there symbolised British occupation of the eastern half of the continent claimed by Captain James Cook on 22 August 1770.

Some immigrants who prospered in Sydney, especially those who had been convicts or the sons of convicts, began marking the colony's beginnings with an anniversary dinner - 'an emancipist festival' to celebrate their

love of the land they lived in. Governor Lachlan Macquarie, the emancipists' friend, made the thirtieth anniversary of the day in 1818 a public holiday.

In 1826 at the centre of the anniversary dinner, 'Australia' a new word for the continent, entered the list of toasts. Australia – a land that gave those who had fallen short of the law in England a second chance.

Remember, our God is the God of second chances.

God is the God of second chances- God never gives up on us. He knows our stumbles and our failings. The Bible is full of stories that give to us the compassionate and loving God who watches and waits. King David after his adultery with Bathsheba, Jonah who refused God's command to go to Nineveh, Peter the Apostle and his 3 denials when he declared he didn't know Jesus, the prodigal son who returned after wasted living.

No matter what we have done, who we are, if we confess our failings and sinfulness to our Heavenly Father He will forgive, restore, renew and then reassure us of our place in His family. God is the God of second chances and new beginnings.