

# Second Chance Church

‘I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; behold, I will add fifteen years to your life.’ - Isa.38

The holiday season is the season of second chances and transformations. Maybe you don’t feel that way, because you’re exhausted from end of year work overload, or depressed at home from Covid-19 isolation, or numbed in public life because of so much strife in the world and here in our country. But even if you can’t often see or feel this season of second chances and transformations, it is here. My hope is that the scriptures and our liturgy today will give us the ears to hear and the eyes to see the hidden invitations of God which call us into His special grace in this Advent season.

Let’s set the scene for this season of second chances and transformations by looking at a couple of good Christmas movies; for good art- like good church-helps us see deeper into our lives. ‘It’s a Wonderful Life.’ Is almost unavoidable in this season, and not by coincidence. In it the protagonist, George, loses his innocence, his livelihood and nearly his own life from despair of the trials of his life. That’s when an angel awakens George to see his wonderful life and grants him a second chance to live it. This great story of second chances and transformation merely echoes an older classic, A Christmas Carol, by Charles Dickens. As you all know, that is the one where three ghosts shock Ebenezer Scrooge awake to a second chance at a better life.

It is not by chance that we tell and retell these stories of second chances and transformations as the year comes to an end. Quite literally, as the old year 2020 comes to a close we all look forward to a new start in our lives in 2021. That semester at school or year of work is done, how might next year be better? May there be no Coronavirus in 2021. May Armenia have lasting peace and prosperity. May this country come together and not drift further apart. We even make personal attempts at second chances with our New Year resolutions. This year, I am resolving to get more exercise (again), to lower my cholesterol (again), and speak less at parish council meetings (again).

The movies we watch, our hopes for the world and resolutions for ourselves all tell of the hope within us, yet for so many of us that hope lies deeply buried. Buried under the harsh realities of life that fail our expectations of what the world should be. Buried under our repeated failures to become the better person we hope to be. It is easy to understand the cynicism which is rampant today, with so many broken promises and failed expectations of leaders and institutions. It is easy to just give up believing in this season of second chances and transformations. But our church shows a different way. Rather than believing less and less in anything, our church urges us to believe more and more in God’s power to change our world and ourselves, rather than our own. Our church reminds us every week that hope is real and powerful, but that power is not our own. We are limited in our ability to work good for ourselves and others, but God is not limited in any way. What for us is impossible, for God is possible; such that He alone holds the power of second chances and transformations.

Today’s reading from Isaiah gives us a striking example of this power. In it King Hezekiah, the leader of the Jews, falls ill and knows that he will die soon. He prays to the Lord with tears and repentance to give him a second chance. God responds, saying, “I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; behold, I will add fifteen years to your life.” Now this may seem like movie magic. How could God add years to a life? Well he does just this for every one of us who will travel forward from this old year into the next. God works his magic each year of our lives. It is our part simply to follow King Hezekiah, to look back on the year with tears and repentance and put our hope in God alone. For then we will find that the Christmas season is the season of second chances and transformations because our God is a God of second chances and transformations.

And here you have the true meaning of Christmas and reason for hope in our lives. Jesus’ Christmas birth into this world was, is and always will be the good news of a second chance for all of humankind. The good, true and beautiful are real, and though impossible to realize on our own, they are possible with God. God is the

ultimate and only true New Year resolution. So if you are sick, tired or discouraged and can't seem to get yourself unstuck, call on God for a second chance. If you repeatedly fail to love well those whom you want to love better, ask God for a second chance. If you have been hurt deeply by someone, or you have hurt another, ask God for a second chance. God has not given up on me, you or this church. God is not done yet with me, you or this church. May he hear our prayer and see our tears, so that where our resolution fails, His begins, now and always and unto the ages of ages amen.