

From the Pastor... Manger on the Mantel December 21st, 2025 HAPPY NEW YEAR! There was once a man who got up every morning, and the first thing he did was read the obituary column to find out who had died. Well, on this particular morning, he read that column, and the newspaper by mistake had put his name in the column and reported that he was dead.

He was not only shaken, he was pretty irritated. He called the editor of the newspaper and gave him "what for." Finally, the editor said, "I'll tell you what we'll do. In the morning, we'll put your name in the birth column and give you a brand-new beginning."

There really is something exciting about new beginnings. It's exciting to start a new year because you know it is a new beginning. There's something exciting about starting a new job because you know it is a new beginning. There's something exciting about moving into a new home because you know it could be a new beginning. There's something exciting about a new day because you know with it comes a new beginning.

New beginnings require three simple, but different, "looks." First of all, it requires a look back to see where you've been; and then a look around to see where you are; then, finally, a look ahead to see where you need to go.

Now you can't really get to where you need to go until you know where you are. But you really cannot know where you are until you know where you've been.

Mickey Mantel was going to Yogi Berra's apartment one afternoon and he got lost. He stopped at a pay phone and called Yogi and said, "Yogi, I'm trying to find your apartment, where is it?" Yogi said, "Where are you now?" He said, "I'm at the corner of 5th and Main." Yogi said, "Well, just keep coming in this direction," and hung up.

Your memory is a very powerful tool. Your memory is capable of containing 100 bits of information, or 500 times the information contained in a complete set of encyclopedias (...for those of you who actually remember what an Encyclopedia is!) Your brain has 100 billion neurons, and 100 trillion connections for those memories, 46 ounces of memories in all, and that's if you're average.

There is a reason why God has given us this magnificent tool called a memory. This way we can remember what God has done yesterday, we can trust in what God is doing today, and what God will do tomorrow.

Always remember that God is always present in your life; you just may not always be aware of it. Like Jesus said in Matthew 28:20b, Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

It would be a great exercise for all of us to take the time to sit down and just reflect on the past, and to see God's presence in our life, and God's protection of our life; and see the reminders that come to us on a daily basis that the God that has worked in our past is the God that continues to work in our present, and will work in our future.

Think about a man by the name of Ed. Almost every Friday evening, without fail, when the sun was going down, Ed would go to the beach to his favorite pier, carrying a bucket of shrimp. He would walk out to the end of the pier as the sun was going down, and stand there with his bucket of shrimp, and he would begin to throw the shrimp in the water. Before long dozens of sea gulls would surround him; their wings fluttering and flapping wildly. Ed would stand there tossing out shrimp to those hungry birds. If you were standing next to him you would hear him say, with a smile under his breath, "Thank you, thank you." After the bucket was empty Ed would just stand there, deep in thought, watching the sun going down behind the horizon.

You might think Ed was a weirdo, a few bricks short of a load, a sandwich short of a picnic, that his elevator never went to the top floor, feeding all those sea gulls with a bucket of shrimp.

But what you probably would not have known is that this man's name was Eddie Rickenbacker. Now Eddie Rickenbacker (born and raised in Columbus, Ohio, btw) was a Medal of Honor recipient and the greatest flying ace on the allies side during World War I. In 1942, he was asked by the Secretary of War to be a nonmilitary observer flying across the Pacific on various missions. In October of 1942, the B-17D he was flying in went down.

Miraculously, all the men survived; crawled out of their plane and climbed into a life raft. Captain Rickenbacker and his crew floated for 24 days on the rough waters of the Pacific. They fought the sun, they fought sharks, and most of all they fought hunger. On the eighth day all of their food ran out; all their water was gone; they were hundreds of miles from land, and no one knew where they were. They needed a miracle.

That afternoon they had a simple devotional service, and prayed for a miracle. Then they tried then to go to sleep. Eddie leaned back and pulled his military cap over his nose. All of a sudden he felt something land on the top of his cap.

It was a sea gull! Captain Rickenbacker would later describe how he sat perfectly still until the flash of his hand and a squawk of the gull, he managed to grab it and wring its neck. He tore the feathers off, and he and his crew made a meal of that sea gull. He then used the intestines for bait. With those intestines they caught fish which gave them food and more bait, and the cycle began. With that simple survival technique they were able to survive until they were found and rescued.

Eddie Rickenbacker lived many years after that ordeal, but he never forgot the sacrifice of that first sea gull. He never forgot how God provided that bird in his greatest hour of need, and he never stopped saying, "Thank you." That's why almost every Friday night he would walk out to the end of that pier with a bucket full of shrimp and a heart full of gratitude.

We ought to do the same thing that Captain Rickenbacker did. In 2026, look back and see God's presence in your life, and rejoice in God's protection of your life. Know that the God who worked yesterday, is surely working today, and will work tomorrow for you, your family, and this congregation.

See you in church!

Pastor Fogle