

San Marino Tribune Article, January 8, 2019  
“The Do-Over” by Rev. Jan Cook, Senior Associate Pastor

*“It is not over, this birthing.”*

I love the way we humans suffer from chronic hope at each New Year’s. Every year as the sun travels the shortest path through the sky and we encounter the least daylight and the longest night, we anticipate the lengthening of days. Isn’t it interesting that as modern and sophisticated as we see ourselves, the changing season continues to provide a sense of renewal, determination and commitment to our best selves for the next twelve months. In other words we have this intuition that somehow the universe is inviting us into a “do over” of the life we have been living.

What would you do if you had “it” to do all over again? That’s a question I have asked myself many times until I came to realize that every single day is an open opportunity for a “do over.” Every morning we wake up and have the capacity to breathe, we have an opportunity to write on a clean page. I can turn off the alarm, swing my legs over the side of the bed and make choices about how I will live, contribute, react, love or not love, forgive or hold a grudge, and I get to do this every twenty-four hours! I can choose what voices will fill my head and what shape I want my body. I know what activities give me life and what work sucks the soul right out of me and choose how to use my treasured time. We *always* have choices; even within the ruts we carve into our ordinary lives lie choices of every variety. So as the poet Mary Oliver puts it, *“What shall you do with this one wild and precious life?”*

For Christians, Christmas is a birthing season. It reminds us of the birth of God’s ultimate “do-over” in our lives; the coming of God in the person of a baby named Jesus. We believe that as life continues with its messy mix of madness and impossible joy there is the unchangeable truth of Emmanuel, God-with-us. Our choices are made simpler; *“Will my choice draw me close or take me further away from the source of all love, compassion, mercy and hope? Will the choices I make show love for my neighbor?”* These two questions steer us towards a merciful and compassionate lens through which we can see each other. And in a mystery we don’t quite understand we are renewed, or as scripture put it *“We are new creations, everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!”* The do-over is possible because God is hope itself, as well as love and trust.

*“There are always newer skies into which God can throw stars. When we begin to think that we can predict the Advent of God, that we can box the Christ in a stable in Bethlehem, that’s just the time that God will be born in a place we can’t imagine and won’t believe.” Ann Weems*