

“Where does history begin?” That is the question Richard North Patterson raises in his novel, *Exile*, about the Palestinian/Israeli conflict. He asks each of his characters the question as a means of exploring the roots of that intractable conflict. Does it begin with the establishment of the State of Israel? Does it begin with biblical and Koranic understandings? Does it begin with any specific battle between the two peoples? Where does history begin? Patterson suggests that the answer to that question will determine the ultimate outcome for better or for worse.

As much as this question – and the insightfulness of it – intrigued me, it also led to thinking that the same question can be applied to so many of life’s difficult situations. Which thought led to thinking about some of the issues associated with ministry with and for the older adult.

Where does history begin for a person whose spouse or parent is afflicted with dementia or Alzheimer’s?

Where does it begin for the widow and the widower?

Where does it begin for the older person forced (by circumstances beyond her/his control) to leave a home and a lifetime of memories and mementos?

Where does it begin for the person learning to live with physical and cognitive limitations?

Where does history begin? Does it begin with a specific life changing condition or does it begin with a statement of faith? For the Christian, history begins with the astounding affirmation, “*He is risen!*” It begins with the resultant affirmation, “*Because he lives, I too shall live.*” It begins with the affirmation that God is a God of life and that death has no power over us. And if you agree that this affirmation is about life here and now, as well as what follows this earthly journey, than you will agree that those of us engaged in ministry with and for the older adult have an important message to deliver and to bear witness to. It is the message that no specific event in our lives, no dramatic change in our abilities changes the fact that all people (young, old, or in-between) are offered the promise implicit in such an affirmation. Fulfilled living may be more difficult to discover at certain times and ages of our lives than others, but nonetheless the Gospel promise of *abundant life* is not just for the young and vibrant, it is for all people.

A meaningful ministry with and for older adults begins with this certainty and then struggles with ways to create environments and opportunities for them to embrace the present moment, to find growth in the present moment, and to serve in the present moment. Anything less, it seems to me, is likely a good-hearted, well-intentioned effort, but one that minimizes the amazing promise of the Gospel.

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