

Sunday January 1st, 2017
Three Resolutions
Joshua 3:1-5: Matthew 2:1-12

If you have ever made a New Year's resolution, put your hand up. If you have ever broken a New Year's resolution, put your hand up.

Although we may not be good at making, or keeping, our New Year resolutions, I always think that the beginning of a New Year is a wake-up call for most of us. A new year reminds us that life is not stationary. It's always moving along.

Nine weeks today I turn 65. I'm not sure how that is possible. One day I'm a teenager. A few days later I'm 65. How does that work? On August 4th, I will have been ordained as a minister of Word and Sacrament for 40 years. I still remember the first sermon I ever preached. It's last week's I can't remember!! What's that all about?

But New Year resolutions aren't really about the past are they? They are about the future. They are like the star the Magi followed, the star that led them to the place where fresh starts become possible, which was the place where the Christ Child was.

So our New Year resolutions express our desire for a new beginning, and for a fresh start. They are a mixture of our hopes and our dreams. And, I want to suggest to suggest to you this morning, that they should also, above all, express our faith.

So I want to propose three New Year's resolutions that you can adopt as your own. All three arise out of a passage in the Old Testament Book of Joshua, Chapter 3 verses 1-5. Before I read it. Here's the background. After escaping from slavery in Egypt and wandering about in the desert for 40 years, the Israelites are ready to cross the River Jordan and to finally enter the land that God has promised to give them. It was their time for a fresh start, a new beginning; a time to begin a new chapter in their lives. The story begins:

3 Early the next morning Joshua and all the Israelites left Acacia Grove and arrived at the banks of the Jordan River, where they camped before crossing. ² Three days later the Israelite officers went through the camp, ³ giving these instructions to the people: "When you see the Levitical priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord your God, move

out from your positions and follow them. ⁴ Since you have never traveled this way before, they will guide you.

Here is the first of our three resolutions. Resolution #1:

*I will let God guide my life in 2017
and I will seek his will in all that I do.*

It's these words from that Scripture that inspire that resolution:

⁴ Since you have never traveled this way before . . .

It's true, isn't it? This is the first day of a New Year. Every day in it, every second, will be brand new. We have no idea what 2017 will hold for any of us. We may have hopes, and dreams, and even plans, but as we all know life can change those really quickly. A phone call. A health crisis. An accident. A letter of dismissal. A bankruptcy. A marriage breakup. All of those can cast even our best laid plans aside.

The truth is that by the time we rolled into December we were all pretty comfortable with 2016. We got to know it well. Some of us probably wish we could have lingered there because it was a really good year for us. Some of us are just glad it's over and we quickly want to move on and leave it behind. But for all of us this one thing is true.

⁴ you have never traveled this way before . . .

Now that builds an uncertainty into 2017 that, depending on our personality type, can make this new year either very exhilarating or terribly frightening. But we need to approach that uncertainty with this knowledge - that God is with us and God goes before us.

That's the imagery in our Scripture passage of the priests carrying the "**Ark of the Covenant of the Lord your God**" across the Jordan River with the people following behind it. The Ark is the symbol of the presence of God with his people.

There's an old hymn that expresses this thought:

***Many things about tomorrow
I don't seem to understand:
But I know who holds tomorrow,
and I know who holds my hand.***

So our first resolution needs to be this:

*I will let God guide my life in 2017
and I will seek his will in all that I do.*

Listen to Philippians 3:13-14 (NLT) in the New Testament. It's a great verse for the New Year.

Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.

Resolution #1.

*I will let God guide my life in 2017
and I will seek his will in all that I do.*

In other words, I will live by faith in this New Year.

Resolution #2.

I will dedicate myself to Christ's service by asking God to give me a pure heart.

Our story from the Book of Joshua continue:

⁵ Then Joshua told the people, "Purify yourselves"

In other words, make sure you are prepared spiritually to serve God. If you like, take being "holy" seriously. Turn away from your sins. Get rid of them. Leave them behind. Enter your new land as new people with your hearts tuned to God. Do you remember what Paul said to the Philippians?

Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead ¹⁴ I press on ...

"I press on." We need to do that because the past often has a way of weighing us down. Don't we all have things we wish we'd done differently? Relationships we wish had turned out a different way? Regrets that often consume us? Parts of our lives we wish we could live over again? But we call it "the past" for a reason. It's because it is not coming back. So Scripture is simply giving us good advice when it encourages us to:

"I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us."

This New Year, the words of Psalm 51:10 (NIV) needs to become our prayer:

***Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.***

Resolution #2.

I will dedicate myself to Christ's service by asking God to give me a pure heart.

That means that in 2017 we need to depend on God more and more and depend on ourselves less. We need to let go of our sin and really live our lives for God.

Resolution #3.

I will pray daily asking God to do wondrous things in my life and among us as a congregation.

The Book of Joshua continues the story of the new beginning for the people of Israel. Joshua speaks to them again as they prepare for their new beginning.

"Purify yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do great wonders among you."

Psalm 77:14 says:

***You are the God of great wonders!
You demonstrate your awesome power among the nations.***

And Jesus said:

Yes, ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it!

The image of our God as a God of wonders is very strong during the Advent and Christmas season, but sometimes it fades away during the year, with a brief resurrection, if you'll excuse the pun, at Easter. But our God is a God of wonders throughout the year because he is still in the miracle business.

We saw that at St. Andrew's in 2016 in so many ways:

In the faces of the residents at Botsford House when our Boarding Team ministry turn up on a Wednesday evening.

On the faces, and in the questions, of our children at the annual Spirituality retreat or during Vacation Bible Camp.

In the words of appreciation from the clients at *Inn from the Cold* as our team serves hot meals to them.

In our youth who attended Canada Youth 2016 and shared their experiences with us.

In the enthusiasm of six of our young adults to commit to a Mission trip in Ghana in May of this year.

Wonders abound.

Whether it is in the number of community groups who have found a home at St. Andrew's:

Or in a pair of mittens or a scarf or hat that shields someone from the cold as a result of our Mitten Tree:

Or in a family with food on their table thanks to donations to the Food Pantry:

Wonders abound and miracles happen on a daily basis in St. Andrew' and through our ministries.

God is a God of wonder. A God of miracles. We just have to open our eyes.

OK. So here are the three resolutions again. Will you join me in making them yours in this New Year?

Resolution #1

I will let God guide my life in 2017
and I will seek his will in all that I do.

Resolution #2.

I will dedicate myself to Christ's service by asking God to give me a
pure heart.

Resolution #3.

I will pray daily asking God to do wondrous things in my life and
among us as a congregation.

Let us pray.

Pastoral Prayer

Almighty God,

You are a God of new things; a new year, a new life, a new song, a
new heart, a new commandment, a new heaven and a new earth, and
in Jesus Christ, a new and living way.

May your Spirit who has guided us through the old year, lead us through this New Year.

May our feet follow in your footsteps, and may we never turn away from it.

May you instruct us in the way we should go, and may you watch over us on our journey.

Teach us to forget what is behind and to keep our eyes firmly fixed on Jesus who is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

Be with all those who enter this New Year already burdened by grief, health concerns, sorrow or pain.

Be with those who are lonely, those who feel rejected or abandoned, and with those who walk on the narrow margins of our society.

Be with those who look for wonderful things to happen in this New Year; a forthcoming marriage, the birth of their child, a graduation, or a special trip.

Loving God, we commit this New Year to you, and with it we commit ourselves to your service. In Jesus Name. Amen.

