

Meditation: A New Year with New Eyes Isaiah 61:10-62:3; Galatians 4:4-7; Luke 2:22-40; Psalm 148 1-1-06

Happy New Year to you all. It is 2006. It seems amazing to me that we are already here. Last year passed so quickly that it seemed to be gone in the blink of an eye. It was a year full of challenges and opportunities for all of us as individuals, as a church and a community and as a nation. In many ways it was a tough year. Since I prefer even numbered years, I am hoping this next year will be a good one.

Have you made any resolutions yet? Are they “brand spanking new” resolutions, or do they seem to be retreads of resolutions from years gone by? Mine often seem to be retreads of broken resolutions. If they were not, I would be one of the slimmest, trimmest, most fit people in sight.

As I thought of all the resolutions that have gone by the boards in my life, and as I reflected on the scripture readings for this morning, I thought of a resolution that I just might be able to make and keep throughout this next year. It might be one for all of us to consider making and keeping. I would like to resolve to see old familiar things and people, those things and people I take most for granted, through new eyes. This will be a challenge for me, as I think it might be for most people, but the ability to do so will reap rewards.

The little story of Simeon and Anna and their encounter with the infant Jesus has always been a favorite of mine. Here are two elderly people who have waited for many years to see the Messiah. They had studied prophecy and Anna is even called a “prophetess.” These two people looked at all the old words and hoped for something new to come from them.

When Joseph and Mary appeared in the temple to dedicate their child and to go through a purification ritual, Anna and Simeon saw right through the old words of prophecy with new eyes. They knew, with certainty, that this baby was the one that had been waited and hoped for, for many years. The consolation or vindication of Israel was near—the same consolation that was prophesied in the book of Isaiah. But Anna’s and Simeon’s recognition and vision go beyond the consolation of Israel to the salvation of the whole world. For this child, they said, was to be a light for the Gentiles as well as a light for Israel. This was, indeed, a new way of looking at the Messiah, a far more expansive and inclusive way. And, they were right. The message of hope, forgiveness, joy, love, transformation and reconciliation with God was offered to all through the life and teachings of Christ.

Part of Jesus’ message of transformation is the ability to see things and events in our lives and our world with new eyes. We all have at least a touch of Simeon and Anna within us. Our lives can change in a noticeable way if we try to adapt more to people and events. Sometimes we even need to have a “live and let live philosophy.”

If we have been struggling with a problem, it could be the time to turn it over in our mind’s eye and consider it from a fresh angle. Much can be gained from a renewed effort in handling what may appear to be a permanent roadblock.

Or, if we have been struggling with a person, it is time to try to look for what is good in him or her instead of looking for those qualities we cannot tolerate. Psychologists tell us that the qualities we like the least in others are those we have and dislike the most in ourselves. This might just be true.

The ability to take a fresh new look at anything requires that we have a certain amount of open-mindedness and flexibility. That we are willing to consider that some of our hardest held ideas may need some alteration; that we are bold enough to venture forth in new directions with new hope.

Most of us seem to begin a new year with renewed strength and determination that it will be better than years past. Sometimes we wait eagerly for the stroke of midnight on December 31st to begin again. What we seem to forget is that we always have the chance to begin our lives anew at any moment because of the love and grace of God. If we are brave enough to consider a new direction in life, God will travel beside us showing us the doors, not always opening them,

but letting us know where they are. This assurance of this came to us through Jesus, who walks before us showing us the way. Amen