

Some Better Resolutions

I Samuel 2:18-20, 26; Colossians 3:12-17; Luke 2:41-52; Psalm 148 12-31-06

It seems hard to believe that we are at the end of another year. 2006 is almost gone. To observe the transition to the beginning of a new year, some of us will indulge in the tradition of spending some time composing New Year's Resolutions with the goal in mind of doing "something" or "some things" better in 2007.

Almost all of our resolutions focus on some sort of self-improvement. We want healthier bodies, healthier minds, healthier finances, and in some cases, healthier souls. If we are fortunate, we will manage to misplace our lists in the not too distant future so we will not be embarrassed by how poorly most of us do in keeping our newly minted resolutions. And heaven help us if we find an old list from several years back that reminds us that we seem to keep making and breaking the same resolutions over and over again.

We are all human and while we have good intentions for our present and our future, it takes effort to fulfill our good intentions and change the way we have been accustomed to living. We all like to take the path of least resistance in life and try to keep everything on a somewhat even keel. Change, even if it brings improvement, can lead to conflict and pain and we do not much like either. But, often growth requires both of those dreaded elements.

Jesus and Samuel continued to grow in wisdom and in stature as they aged. They increased their knowledge of God and God's desire for them. Samuel had little to no choice in the matter. His mother, Hannah, had promised that if God would let her have a son, she would dedicate him to service in the temple. So, she did and Samuel grew up with Eli, a wise teacher. Samuel later heard the voice of God calling him in the night, a call that guided him through the rest of his life.

Jesus' story is somewhat similar. Just as God had a claim on Samuel before he was born, the same claim was upon Jesus. In our reading from the Gospel of Luke, we have the only evidence of Jesus as a child. We discover him in the temple after being left behind by his parents on a trip to Jerusalem. He was dazzling the teachers there with his agile brain. After this event we lose sight of him until he was about 30 years old. What he did in this time before taking up his public ministry, we do not know. But, evidently, he continued to grow in wisdom and in favor with God. If we follow his example, we do the same.

But just in case we need a little help, we find a list of ways to accomplish this in the Letter to the Colossians. If we feel very strong on this New Year's Eve, we might even consider taking on a few of the characteristics listed as some of our own resolutions. But, if we do, we must be ready for changes to take place in our lives. For we cannot adopt any of the proposed behaviors without finding our selves turned around in some areas of life.

The author of this little letter, some believe it was Paul, but evidence is scarce in this respect, begins by listing five heavy-duty requirements for people to be followers of Christ. They are to clothe themselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. We each need to ask ourselves how our lives would be affected if we were to suddenly adopt all five characteristics.

What if we become more compassionate people? The word “compassion” means to “suffer with.” What if we truly could begin to understand others by walking in their shoes for a bit? What would happen if we walked every hill on another’s pathway and felt every pebble that happened into his or her shoe? Reflect on this a bit.

What would happen if we looked at one another with kindness and not judgment? What if we decided to live in our own world of “live and let live?” What would happen if we could take the edge off ourselves that protects us from others? What would happen if we became gentler people in our dealings?

Then there is humility. What if we stopped tooting our own horns? What if we decided that being important, whatever that means, is not, well, important? What if we decided to set all claims to fame and pride aside and if we followed in the footsteps of the one who came to guide us?

Meekness, does not mean weakness. It does mean that we seek ways to work with others to create a harmonious whole. What if we started doing this in our own little corner of the world? What if a sense of cooperation instead of a need to impose one’s will on others began to prevail?

Then there is patience. “God give me patience and I want it right now!” Patience goes a long way in our lives. Persevering and persisting in trying to get something right so that it works takes patience. This is especially true in relationships. Once we throw out patience and give up, all is lost. But if we can see the value in another person and if we want to make things whole again, we can do it with a lot of patience. Not always, but often.

From these five qualities, the author of Colossians moves to the need for forgiveness. “Bear with one another and forgive as you have been forgiven.” This is a hard one. But it is so important. If we do not let go of the bitterness and pain we believe has been inflicted upon us by others, how can we have life and have it abundantly? Dragging around old injuries just weighs us down. And, if we do not accept the forgiveness of another given to us, we travel on imposing a burden on ourselves and on the one who needs our forgiveness. As I reminded you during Advent, weak people can never forgive. It takes people of strength to let others off the hook of their judgment.

Of course, the author of this letter tells us all that we need to put on love for it binds everything together in perfect harmony. If we are able to love unconditionally everything begins to fall into place and we discover that we begin to develop all the qualities of the good life we wish for. Peace comes to us and we can see all things in a new and brighter light. And we grow in wisdom and in favor with our God. And we become grateful for the lives we have and more reflective about their direction. Love, in this instance, does indeed, conquer and bind all.

So, as we resolve to make life a little different for 2007, we need to look beyond what may just satisfy our egos and leave us standing in the same space we have always occupied. We need to consider making a few better resolutions along with our same old ones that will guide us more surely into the lives God intended for us. Step by step and bit by bit we all can move forward into the light of a better way and a better day. Amen