

Wesley United Methodist Church

December 31, 2017

“A Sermon for the New Year.”

Luke 2:22-40

We're only a few hours away from the New Year, and I can feel the anticipation, or dread, depending on your pint of view. Our calendar did not come from above. It was established by human minds. There is no real reason why one day on the calendar should bear more significance than any other day of the year. Yet still we invest the changing of the year with a great deal of meaning. It is a time of hope, of planning, of visioning. And, of course, it's a time of resolutions. Ready or not, it is time to set yourself on a course of self-improvement.

There is a list of resolutions that is called the 7-ups for the new year. This has nothing to do with the soft drink. These 7-ups fall under the heading of attitudes and actions.

The first is Wake-Up—Begin the day with the Lord. It's his day. Rejoice in it.

The second is Dress-Up—Put on a smile. It improves your looks. It says something about your attitude.

The Third is Shut-Up—Watch your tongue. Don't gossip. Say nice things. Learn to listen.

The Fourth is Stand-Up—Take a stand for what you believe. Resist evil. Do good.

Five, Look-Up—Open your eyes to the Lord. After all, he is your only Savior.

Six, Reach-Up—Spend time in prayer with your adorations, confessions, thanksgivings and supplications to the Lord.

And finally, Lift-Up—Be available to help those in need, serving, supporting, and sharing.

If you're going to make New Year's resolutions this year, let me suggest this list.

Why do we bother to make New Year's resolutions in the first place? Why do we feel this need each January 1 to set new goals? Maybe it's because resolutions help us to identify our priorities. They answer the question: how do I want to invest my time, energy, money, and talents this new year? The new year reminds us that time is passing. It is up to each of us to maximize the potential of every moment.

Someone wrote some thought-provoking words on the meaning of time: To realize the value of “one month,” ask a mother who gave birth to a premature baby. To realize the value of “one week,” ask the editor of a weekly newspaper. To realize the value of “one hour,” ask lovers who are waiting to meet. To realize the value of “one minute,” ask the person who missed the train. To realize the value of “one Second,” ask the person who just avoided an accident. To realize the value of “one millisecond,” ask the person who won a silver medal in the Olympics. The coming of the new year forces us to face the question” what will be my priorities this year?

That's the question that Simeon, the central figure in today's Bible passage, didn't have to ask himself. His New Year's resolution was the same every year: to wait for the Messiah. A zealous person in religion is pre-eminently a person of one thing. He only sees one thing, he cares for one thing, he lives for one thing, he is swallowed up in one thing; that one thing is to please God. Whether he lives or whether he dies, whether he has health or whether he has sickness, whether he is rich or whether he is poor...for all this the zealous person cares nothing at all. He lives for one thing; and that one thing is to please God, and to advance God's glory.

Simeon lived for one thing. His passion? To greet the coming Messiah. Simeon was zealous for only one thing. Only one purpose in life. Only one focus in prayer. His first thought upon rising and his last thought upon lying down was, when will I see God?

In the book of Jeremiah, chapter 29:13 the Lord tells his people, “You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.” And many centuries later Jesus would echo this sentiment when he said, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.” (Matth. 5:6 & 8)

We are told that Simeon was a man with a pure heart. He had been blessed with a special assurance from the Holy Spirit: that he would not die before he had seen the coming Messiah.

Many older people face the future with anxiety. They may fear a future of failing health, shrinking finances, social isolation. Some people reach their senior years only to face a life of meaninglessness. Their self-imposed goals have been met. Their social-ascribed roles no longer fit. Their life dwindles down to a period of anxious waiting.

And so the stage is set for Simeon's defining moment. He is in the courtyard of the Temple and he sees a humble young couple. There was nothing distinguishing about this couple, except for the squirming baby in their arms. There is nothing about the baby that we know of that distinguished it from other babies, but somehow old Simeon knows this is the One he has been waiting for. He walks up to the poor couple, takes their squirming baby boy from their arms, and announces that he has finally seen the Christ.

Listen to Simeon's declaration, "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and glory to your people Israel."

Have you ever thought about what Simeon's life was like after he was Jesus? The Bible doesn't give us any details. For we all know, Simeon may have died a happy man that very afternoon. Or he may have lived for a few more years. What was his life like after that? He had seen the Lord's promise of salvation. He had found perfect peace. There was certainly no more anxiety in Simeon's future. He had seen Jesus.

John Donne put it this way, "I shall not live til I see God. And when I have seen him, I shall never die."

There is a Hebrew word for the motion Simeon felt that day. The Hebrew word Shalom carries both the meaning of peace and salvation. In the tiny baby, Jesus, Simeon found shalom. His life was complete. An encounter with Jesus will do that,

And here is the Good News: you and I can have the shalom that changed Simeon's life 2,000 years ago. You and I can find peace and salvation.

Do you want to face the New Year with Shalom, Peace and Salvation? Before we leave the Christmas season behind, you are invited to look into the face of the Christ Child one last time and to see there your hope for this year and every year. May this be your defining moment when you experience the coming of the Lord.