

December 2018 Newsletter Article: "Church New Year's Resolutions"

Happy New Year, everyone! Yes, I can hear some of you saying already, "Pastor, you're about one month too early." Not when it come to the Church year. Our Church year begins with the First Sunday in Advent which this year falls on December 2nd.

For the calendar year, people have been known to make New Year's Resolutions. Often, these have to do with things like losing weight, breaking some bad habit, or vowing to "get into shape" through proper diet and exercise. A friend of my family back in New York worked in the produce department of a local grocery store. She said that the busiest time of the year for them was right at beginning of the New Year when people were resolving to eat a more healthy diet. Then, after about a week or so, things, she said, went "back to normal."

Yes, we might feebly attempt to make resolutions when the calendar turns 2019. But how about we, this month, look to make "Church New Year's Resolutions!" Actually, right at the Second Sunday in Advent (December 9th), you will hear the words of John the Baptist calling us to do that very kind of thing. But John takes us beyond the often trivial resolutions that we so often make at the beginning of January. He speaks of himself, in fulfillment of the words of Isaiah 40, as "the voice of one crying in the wilderness" (Luke 3:3). Then, he proclaims, "Prepare the way of the Lord. Make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain brought low; And the crooked places shall be made straight, And the rough ways be made smooth; And all flesh shall see the salvation of God" (Luke 3:3-6).

As you read further along in Luke, Chapter Three, John speaks about more than just making resolutions. He tells us, "Bear fruits worthy of repentance", and, "... even now the ax is laid at the root of the trees. Therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (Luke 3:8-9). This is more than just a call to "turn over a new leaf"—this is a call to thoroughly examine our lives and see where we truly stand in our relationship to both God and one another.

In 2 Corinthians 13:5, Paul writes, "Examine yourself as to whether you are in the faith." Advent is such a season for this as we prepare for our annual celebration of Our Lord's birth at Christmas. But truly, at all times of the year, we are called to self-examination and to needed repentance. Such is the way of the Christian—for ours is not a faith of "easy believism". As an old hymn puts it, "I gave my life for thee; Give thou thyself to Me." Knowing of this greatest gift that Jesus has given to us already, may we freely give ourselves to Him and to others as our "Church New Year's Resolution" (Romans 12:1-2).

Your Brother in Christ,

Pastor Bill