

Sunday, January 10, 2021

Psalms 27:1-4, 11-14 | John 2:1-11, 15-17

Back on Track: Daily Steps to Begin a New Year

Mid day: Taking God with you Wherever You Go

We are now in the second week of January 2021 and if you are one of the many people who make New Year's Resolutions I ask you, how well have you been keeping the resolutions? Some resolutions are easier to keep than others and of course with the lockdown some of these ideas would have been stopped before they could even be acted upon. An example of this would include working out at the gym—no gyms or fitness centres are open right now with the lockdown. But if you resolved to: 'spend more time at home, with family and doing creative activities', there is no excuse to keep this resolution! This is what New Year's resolutions are supposed to do. They are to improve your attitude to what daily life can involve. As people of faith we often state that we also resolve to grow faithfully and in closer relationship with God and each other not just because it is a New Year, but because God calls us to do this.

This week we celebrated Epiphany which is the story of the Wise Men who travelled from the East to see the child Jesus and to offer him gifts. We must remember that they did not appear at the stable but at a house as Joseph and Mary left the stable and found a place to live with the baby. Time would have also passed as the wise men did not travel by plane or train but by camel caravan stopping as they needed to along the way. When they eventually found Jesus and his parents they were in a house and then they presented the child with gifts of gold, myrrh and frankincense. These gifts were not really for a child but for one who had status and a special place in history or future history as the Wise Men knew he would. They had searched and found the "One who was born, the King of the Jews". Living generations later, we might ask of others if we are like the Wise Men and searching for Him, too?

This week has seen more cases of covid19 across Ontario. There have been more families grieving the deaths of loved ones due to this virus. There have been political challenges because of new strains of this virus in the United Kingdom and it seems people around the world are wondering what will happen next. But no one thought of ever seeing rioters storming the US Capitol on January 6 leaving many injured and four people dead all for the purpose of making a political statement that many just did not want to be heard. Political divisions abound but one thing which is certain, is the need for healing in the US not only for the many suffering

with covid19 but for the relationships amongst the people. Where this healing must begin is from within and outward to the One who made us all equal- God.

As we continue in these early days of 2021 we need to decide to get build up our relationships with each other and to get back on track or to refocus our lives about what it means to live our lives for Christ. As we move into this New Year let us remember what the prophet Jeremiah (15:19) wrote as a way of understanding our lives in relationship to God. He states, "If you return to me, I will restore you." We need to be restored as we grow in faith and as we seek God in our every day living.

The Wise Men saw the child and offered him gifts fit for an earthly king but they also knew that his purpose was not for this world but for the kingdom of God. So in light of this, we might ask ourselves just what our purpose really is? The main purpose of each one of us is to glorify God. That is, we are "to know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture." (Psalm 100) The Wise Men worshiped Jesus and by their example we too worship and offer our gifts to Christ Jesus. The gifts we offer are not just our money but what we might consider as the 5 D's of discipleship.

- 1) Decide to work for God. (Colossians 3:24) Whatever you do, put yourselves into it as done for the Lord and not your masters.
- 2) Direct your thoughts (Psalm 113:3) All day long what are you thinking about? Yes, the tasks that are before you, the way to do it well and to complete them. But what about thinking of how God helps you not just when we wake up but, "From the rising of the sun to its setting, the name of the Lord is to be praised." This includes praying at work by:
 - Giving thanks at all times and in every way. (Ephesians 5:20)
 - Asking for help –with the job to help figure out what has to be done (Psalm 121:2)
 - Sending and being sent—volunteering to serve (Isaiah 6:8)
 - Asking that God's will be done and what this means (Luke 22:42)
 - Reassurance that you are not alone (Psalm 23:4)
- 3) Do everything with enthusiasm (Romans 12:1) Be ardent in spirit, serve the lord with joy. Do you excited about what your day might include- talking with people learning new concepts, accomplishing difficult challenges? Do you smile as you work at any point in your day? Do you show your excitement when others can see it?

- 4) Determine that what you do each day will be done gently (I Peter 3:15-16) Even though you might be afraid don't be intimidated by others but know Christ is with you. Be ready to share your faith and hope by being kind and gentle just as Jesus spoke gently and kind to those whom he healed.
- 5) Dedicate your life's work (John 14:6) Jesus is the way the truth and the life. As we look to each day we are given, let us do what we are called to do for Christ Jesus because of what he did for you through his promised gift of life everlasting

As we go through our days we are reminded that God Father, Son and Spirit is walking with us, working, playing, learning all of the time with us. But there is a commitment needed on our part as well. We need to say "I have come to know him and in faith I believe Christ died for me and through Jesus' resurrection we have been forgiven. By believing in him we put our faith into action. Throughout our days, we obey his commandments as is written in the First Letter of John (2:1-11,15-17) But if we do not obey we are untruthful. Yet if we follow Christ's commands we can state that 'we abide in him.'"

In these days when it seems that darkness is all around us for not only does it seem that the sun is not shining very often, but the coronavirus pandemic has taken away many of the opportunities to gather with others just to have fun. Yet we must remember that there is hope. There is hope in the name of God because he has not abandoned us. Even in this moment the darkness is passing away and the true light is shining. This light is Jesus Christ. But, if you say, I am in the light, and hate a brother or sister, you are really in the darkness. And in order to fully live in the light, we must love each other and not cause others to stumble into darkness. We must walk with others and share the light that shines because of Jesus Christ

When Jesus was born a bright star appeared in the sky and stayed there for a long time. This is how the Wise Men knew something had happened that was important. They had watched the skies for a sign and followed it. Jesus is the Light of world which shines brighter than any other light if we look for Him. And when we look for Jesus, we will be forever changed. Because he makes a different in your life and you will want to follow and live each day in and for love. However, there are parameters or boundaries as well for we are not to love the world or the things in the world as they exist.

I John 2 tells us that the things in world which we are not to love include the desires of the flesh which are excessive or inappropriate. This might include anything from food to sexual

impurity but, not about normal or necessary physical desires. Second are desires of "the eyes," which not only refers to those things we literally see, but those we imagine or put our "mental" eyes on. The third desire is the "pride of life," which include sinful desires that bring attention to self. This also refers to our habit of bragging about ourselves or what we can do better than others. These desires and pride are not given to us by God but arise as temptations from the godless world. This is why a person marked by love for the world does not have the love of God in him. In verse 17, we read that if these shallow desires pass away, the will of God—and those who do it —will live forever.

So what are we to do during the day? The tasks set before us at home and wherever God leads you. How are we to do them? With enthusiasm and gentleness; with prayer as we keep in dialogue throughout the day with Christ and to do what we can with the hope of doing whatever is before us with completeness and to the best of our ability. We may also pray to God with thanksgiving as we share in the tasks before us. If what we are to do challenges our thoughts or abilities we might also pray for help, or whether what we are asked to do is appropriate or if we can do it at all. But whatever and wherever we go as we live this life we must remember that there is no where that we go that God has not been before. And there is no place or experience that we have or will have that Jesus himself cannot understand. He became human for our sake and for us to do what we are called to do means to trust God's Spirit to guide us always.

Tyler Perry an American actor and Christian often produces movies based on his faith. He states: "Take God with you everywhere you go, and where you can't take him, don't go."

As we get Back on Track in 2021, let us remember to live out our faith each hour of every day. God will give us the strength we need, might to uphold us and wisdom to guide us. Christ walks with us and talks with us and encourages us to full live. The Spirit guides our thoughts and leads us to praying for peace, to sing with joy and to work for a new world filled with hope. But we must answer God's call to serve Christ for as Christians our hope it to restore the world to God and to renew our minds as faithful followers.

Let us pray

God of grace and hope we believe that Jesus is the Light of the world sent to us to bring hope out of darkness. May your Spirit speak to our hearts in this moment as we breathe in your gift of life. Reach out to us we pray with encouragement and the strength we need to get back on track as we live out our love for you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.