

Today is an interesting day to be in church. How we structure this worship service and where we put the emphasis depends largely on which calendar we choose... and today we have several choices. One option is to use that calendar which tells us that today is the **first Sunday after Christmas**. Since Christmas is not only a day but a season... and since this season lasts a total of twelve days (as the song says)... that would put today a little more than halfway through Christmastide. What this means is that today we should probably sing all the carols we can stand... read passages of Scripture that continue to tell the story of the birth of Jesus into our world... and hear a riveting/gripping sermon on what it really, really means for God to come among us.

The second option would be to look ahead to Epiphany which technically doesn't get here until January 6th – twelve days after Christmas. We could focus on the things we usually do on that day – the star of Bethlehem, the magi coming from the east with gifts for the child, and what it means that this child brings light to the whole world. But as you heard earlier, we are having an Epiphany service this coming Wednesday in which we will celebrate all of these things.

But then there's a third option this morning... and that is to stop looking at the Christian calendar for one week and be guided by the calendar we have tacked to our wall or in an app on our devices. And as you know, on this calendar today is New Year's Day.

I'm going to assume that some of you were out way past your bedtime last night celebrating the arrival of 2017. Some of you may have donned funny hats or glasses and made all kinds of noise as the ball dropped... yet here you are this morning – in church of all places – which leads me to also assume that you consider being in church with your Christian sisters and brothers a good place to bring in the new year and that you may be ready... you may be ready to make some resolutions. So what will they be?

Well, I did a quick internet search last week and found a list of the top resolutions for 2016 which is probably a good indication of what we will resolve in 2017. Some will not surprise you – lose some weight, quit smoking, quit drinking, get in shape, get organized, spend more time with family and friends, save more and spend less, pay down debt. But other top resolutions are not so predictable - find love, help others, learn something new... and the top resolution for this past year was “enjoy life to its fullest.”¹

I suppose some of these are already on your list or soon will be. I also notice that consistency of these resolutions from year to year not only speak to the kind of people we want to be, but the kind of people we are. Apparently, as a nation we are overweight and out of shape... we smoke and drink too much... we spend too much and save too little... we are too busy for family and friends... we are self-absorbed and disorganized and stuck in a rut. On the other hand, we believe that if we could only keep these resolutions (not sure to include this part)

I couldn't help noticing about these resolutions is that it's not just one area of our lives we want to improve, but all of them. Those resolutions seem to fall into four categories and if we might borrow the Biblical terms, these categories are heart, mind, soul, and strength... the very aspects which form the essence of human being. In the “heart” category we might include time with family and friends and enjoying life more. Under “mind” we might list learning something new or getting organized. Under “soul” we might list helping others or even getting out of debt, since debt is one of the things that can truly trouble our soul. And under strength you would list those other things – eating well and getting enough exercise, giving up smoking or drinking. In other words, our New year's resolutions often involve every aspect of our being – heart, mind, soul, and strength – which says to me that we want our whole life to be better; and not only part of it.

¹ <http://abc7chicago.com/society/top-5-new-years-resolutions/1143269/>

Can I tell you now what my Dad would sometimes say to me and what I have said to my children and so many others? "Son," he would say, "please... do as I say and not as I do." I can't tell you how much that has meant to me over the years as I have tried to heart, soul, mind and strength in my own life... and as I, as a husband and father and pastor, have tried to be a role model for my children and family and the members of the congregations I have served. I have said it often... because it confesses what is true - that there is always some distance (sometimes a lot of distance) between what I know is good... what I say is good... and what I actually do. This distance between intention and fulfillment... between desire and ... is why we make these resolutions each year... and it's why they are basically the same ones we've made the year before. We are human beings – frail and fallible – and we need help. Which is precisely why God sent Jesus into the world at Christmastime. He came not to give us the life we want, but the life we need... the life we were created to live.

Because resolutions are tremendously hard to keep... it takes a tremendous amount of drive and determination

Not that you would, but let's say you resolve to come to church every Sunday in 2017. A preacher can dream can't he? If you have, you're off to a good start.