

January 5, 2020

*New Year's Meditation*

John Wesley United Methodist Church

Philippians 3:10-16

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Here we are, the first Sunday of a new year! A new decade! 2020! And so, again – Happy New Year! Now there's something introspective about a new year, isn't there? Because it's a good time to think about our lives, our situations, even our purpose in this life. And it's also a time to make some positive changes, a time to begin again. A time to put the past behind us and look to the future. That's why I like today's scripture where St. Paul says, "I focus on one thing: forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead." Because as a Christian, I trust that I can leave the past behind. That I am forgiven and made new through Christ's great sacrifice. And I can hold on to God's promise, "I know the plans I have for you – plans for good and not harm. To give you a future with hope." As I was reflecting on this new year, I came across a statement by Oswald Chambers that I really liked. He said when entering a new year, "Leave the irreparable past in God's hands, and step out into the irresistible future with Him." "Leave the irreparable past - those things and issues that haunt you and me - leave those in God's hands, and step out into the irresistible future with Him."

Sounds exciting doesn't it? To think of what irresistible future God might have in store for you? So as you think of your hopes and plans for the coming year, I want to share with you a video that I think might help us see things in a different way, with a new perspective.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ytFB8TrkTo>

"When you know your 'why,' your 'what' become more impactful because you're walking towards, or in, your purpose." Now this is an important point to keep in mind, not just in a new year, but as we go through life. Because I think sometimes we go along, doing our thing, doing what we've always done, without really thinking about "why" we're doing it. Yet, it's the "why" that should keep us motivated, keep us going. Let me explain. You know, many people make New Year's Resolutions. And many people don't keep their New Year's Resolutions very long. What's the reason? Well, for example, let's say my resolution is, "I'm going to exercise more in the new year." That's 'what' my resolution is. And when asked, "why I'm going to exercise more?" I might simply say it's because I know I should. But that's really not a 'why', that's a duty I've put on myself." Therefore, that resolution probably won't last long. But – if my 'why' is: Because "I like my life, and if I want to live a long, healthy life, I need to exercise. Plus, I feel better when I exercise, more energized. And, as a bonus, it gives me time to think and pray." That's a 'why' that will be more impactful and keep me going.

And it's the same with our Christian life. We often think about going to church, serving on a ministry team, volunteering at an event, participating in a study, singing in the choir, giving our time and money. And that is the 'what' we do as Christians. And hopefully it brings us joy, and we know we're doing something good, something meaningful. But let me ask you to think about the 'why' you're doing it? What motivates you to serve, to give, to volunteer? Well, if you say, 'Pastor Rebecca wants me to.' or 'I know I should do something for the church,' that's a duty you've put on yourself, it's not a 'why.' However, if your 'why' is: "Because I love God, and I want to live the life he has planned for me. I want to learn to live like Christ so that I can make a difference in this world. I want bring love and hope and joy to those around me." Now that's a motivation that comes from the heart, and will be more impactful and keep you going. And that sounds like discipleship. So in this coming year, I hope all of us here at John Wesley will begin to think about our 'why.' Why do we do the things we do? why do we make the decisions we make; why do we have the attitudes we have? Because your answer to that question will make all the difference. Your answer will impact your future and the future of John Wesley.

And so consider – what if your answer to the question 'why,' is: "Because I love God. I want to be a disciple and live a Christ-like life." You see, if that's your answer – you've just opened yourself up to be led by God into that irresistible future. Jesus told his disciples, "I came that you might have life and have it abundantly. I have chosen you, and you will do the things I have done, and even greater things. You are the light of the world. If you abide in me, you will bear much fruit." Yes, you can be the light of the world, the salt of the earth, the one who sets the standard of good and right and just to the people around you. Yes, God has plans to use you. To make a difference. To make an impact on people's lives.

You know, we hear the word 'disciple' a lot, and your Leadership Team has spent much time discussing this. So I want to share with you their definition because that can help you think about your 'why.'

*"A disciple loves and follows Jesus Christ, striving to learn about Christ, love like Christ, serve for Christ and share Christ."*

It's simple – a disciple loves Christ and wants to be like Christ. As Jesus told his disciples, "If you love me, you will do what I say." You see, it all boils down to love for Christ. Oswald Chambers also said, "The Lord does not give me rules, but he makes his standard very clear. And if my relationship to him is that of love, I will do what he says without any hesitation. If I hesitate, it is because I love someone else in competition with him, namely myself."

And so, in this new year, let our 'why' be our love for the Lord, and our desire to be his disciple. Because when you love the Lord, it will affect not only your church life, but all your life. It will affect your future, because it will affect the way you live, the things you say, the things you do, the decisions you make. When you strive to be like Christ, you will be less stressed, less worried, less frustrated. You will be more patient, more kind, more at peace with yourself and others. I don't know what God has in store for you, for any of us, in 2020. But I'll close with these words from St. Paul. "Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal to receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus is calling me." Now that's an irresistible future! Amen.

And so as we prepare to come to the Table of our Lord, where God has made the promise to us that we are forgiven and made new, let us make our promise to God to seek to live as a disciple of Christ. We will do so by praying the prayer that John Wesley would use at his covenant services. I will pray it through first, and then we will pray together.

## Wesleyan Prayer

Lord, I am no longer my own, but yours

Put me to what you will. Place me with who you will.

Put me to doing, Put me to suffering,

Let me be put to work for you. Or set aside for you.

Praised for you, Or criticized for you

Let me be full, Let me be empty

Let me have all things, Let me have nothing.

I freely and fully surrender all things to your glory and service.

And now, O glorious and blessed God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, you are mine and I am yours.

So be it. And the covenant I have made here on earth this day with you, let it be ratified in heaven.

Amen.

Now, as the lines of the prayer come on the slide, we will pray the line all together, and then I will offer an additional prayer.

Let us pray...

*Lord, I am longer my own, but yours....*

May the 'why' of my life be to love and honor and follow you.

*Put me to what you will...*

Lord, use me wherever and however and to whomever you wish. Whatever it is, make my life count for you. Your will be done.

*Place me with who you will...*

Lord, there may be somebody that needs my help. Even somebody who is different, who has conflicting values or lifestyle, who takes me outside my comfort level. Make me a blessing to them through your unconditional love.

*Put me to doing...*

Help me to use my time and energy to shine your light, bear good fruit, and sacrifice to help others.

*Put me to suffering...*

Help me learn from the difficulties and trials I face. Use my sufferings to make me rely more on you. And help me to remember that even Jesus suffered, and you were able to bring good out of evil, and life out of death.

*Let me be put to work for you...*

Lord, you have given me specific gifts and talents and I promise to use them to labor for you, your kingdom and your people.

*Or set aside for you...*

Especially when I become an obstacle to others seeing you in me when I don't speak or act the way I should. Convict me and stop me, so I don't bring dishonor to your name.

*Praised for you...*

When I do right by you, and others see you by what I've done, then I will accept any acclaim I receive with grace and the full knowledge that it is only because of you that I can do anything at all.

*Or criticized for you...*

When others do not agree with me, let me listen with an open mind, acknowledging that you may be speaking through them. Help me be willing to change.

*Let me be full...*

Let me be filled with your Holy Spirit this year, filled with your love and joy and peace and generosity.

*Let me be empty...*

Let me know that I am nothing in and of myself. Empty me of pride, selfishness, arrogance, laziness, indifference, cynicism. Empty me of all that is not you.

*Let me have all things,*

If you choose to grant me health, family, friends, material possessions, and more, then I will prove grateful for all these gifts from you.

*Let me have nothing...*

If you choose that I am to be in need, or that things are taken away, then help me to remember that though I don't have much, I still have enough. I have you.

*I freely and fully surrender all things, to your glory and service ...*

Jesus said, "For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it." I give myself, my thoughts, my attitudes, over to you. I want to glorify and praise you in all areas of my life. O Lord God, I want only what you want.

*And now, O glorious and blessed God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, you are mine and I am yours. So be it. And the covenant that I have made here on earth this day with you, let it be ratified in heaven.*

*Amen.*