

Resolving to Give Your Heart to Jesus

Mark 1: 1-11

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There's a story about a woman driving behind another car as they were approaching an intersection. The light turned yellow, and the car in front decided to stop and not run the yellow light. The woman in the car behind was furious and started to honk her horn and swore 'a blue streak'. In mid-rant, a policeman knocked on the woman driver's window and asked her to get out of the car. The officer took the woman to the station and handcuffed her. After an hour, the officer called the woman back and apologized for the mix-up. He told her that when he heard the horn and the high volume of swearing coming from the woman's mouth, after looking at the Bumper stickers which stated 'choose life' and another one which said, "What would Jesus do", the officer thought the car was stolen.

This woman seemed to believe in Jesus, but did she let go and give Jesus her heart? We can clearly see this kind of damaging behaviour in other Christians, but not as clear in ourselves.

New Year's, in a way, is about repentance. When we engage in New Year's resolutions we desire to change something about ourselves for the better. We may be ashamed about how we have treated others, and have a conviction to change. When Jackie and I asked our eldest son Luke about his New Year's resolutions he responded by separating it out in three categories: what he resolved to *continue* doing; to *start* doing; and to *stop* doing. I believe this is helpful because it is important to look at the whole picture of our own life - what is good and what is not so good. In other words, in reflecting on how we have lived our lives this past year, we examine how our path was in line with Christ, and how we need to clear the obstacles away which obstruct our path to serving Christ.

*John the Baptist spoke out as recorded in Mark 1: 3b, "**Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.**"* We have the opportunity at the beginning of this year to have a fresh start and think about our faith - our trust in Christ, and how our lives reflect that faith.

Many Christians in the world annually celebrate Epiphany on January 6. Epiphany is a public holiday in some countries which mark two events in Jesus Christ's life, according to the Bible. The event that was first recorded was when the three wise men (or three kings) saw the great star in the east and visited the baby Jesus. The second event was when St. John the Baptist baptized Jesus. The word 'Epiphany' means that you suddenly have a new understanding or become conscious of something that is really important to you. Christ was revealed to John the Baptist as the Holy Spirit came down as a dove at Jesus' baptism. The light went on (as it were) for the three wise men and for John the Baptist.

The image of Jesus being the light which casts out all darkness speaks to the hope we have in Christ today and for the future - the hope that life will always win over death and good will win over evil. In order to reflect the light of Christ in the way we live (as children of God), we are to decrease our personal agenda and increase Christ's agenda in going forward. Water is also an important biblical metaphor as we think about God's grace. Water is the basis of all life. It is therefore fitting that water is the image used in baptism to illustrate God's gift of life and the gift of God's grace in our lives. It is important for us to remember our own baptism as

a regular part of our reflection in the New Year. When you are walking in the rain, or when you are taking a shower, for example, remember the gift of God's steadfast and unconditional love to you as the water falls on you. We can rest in the knowledge that we are loved not because of what we did or did not do. In baptism we are forgiven and loved unconditionally in spite of our sins and perceived weaknesses.

Why was Jesus baptized if he was without sin? Jesus did not need to be personally forgiven because he was God and therefore without sin. However, Christ did take the sin of the world on his shoulders to defeat the lasting obstacles of sin and death. Here are a few reasons why I think Jesus encouraged John to baptize him: I believe that one of the reasons Jesus was baptized was because he wanted to make the clear connection of his humanity with all of humanity. Secondly, Jesus also provided in his baptism, an example for all of his loved children to follow. Furthermore, the baptism of Jesus marked the first clear announcement in the New Testament of the connection of the trinity – God the father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The uniqueness of each part of the trinity is affirmed in Jesus' baptism, but also the love and unity of the trinity. I also believe it was appropriate for John the Baptist to baptize Jesus because John was called by God to encourage all to prepare the way for the coming Messiah.

Not a magical ritual: Contrary to how some believe, baptism is not a magical ritual that when one is baptized, they are automatically saved. Rather, baptism is a sign that the person being baptized accepts God's grace in their hearts. In the Presbyterian/Reformed churches, infant/child and also believers' baptism is practiced if one was not baptized as a child. If one is baptized as a child, they affirm that previous baptism when they make public profession of faith in Christ for themselves. Baptism says that we are to be obedient to live our lives searching and following God's way, not pursuing our personal agenda. Baptism symbolizes that we agree that we are not our own, but that we belong to God and are called to be obedient to God. Baptism is a shift of power. We relinquish our power, and give it willingly to God. The Holy Spirit is then cut loose, as it were, to move and act in our lives.

Baptism is an outward sign of what is happening inwardly in one's life. Baptism incorporates us in the community of faith and the church. We are all called to personally accept God's grace, but also to use those gifts graciously given by God in the context of the church community to help strengthen the faith of others in the church; and to be part of a unified presence of health and healing to the community beyond the church walls.

We belong to God and are called to be obedient in using our gifts to his glory. Then we ask: What shall I give him, poor as I am. If I were a Shepherd, I would bring a lamb. If I were a wise man, I would do my part. What can I give him, give him my heart. **When we give Jesus our heart, the Holy Spirit is cut loose to empower our gifts for his purposes.**

My prayer for you is a happy new year where you continue to grow in placing your heart's resting place in your loving and faithful God who is with you now and forevermore. Amen.