

Coram Deo
Soli Deo Gloria, Soli Deo Gracia, Soli Scriptura
Agnus Dei, Qui Tollis Peccata Mundi
Deo Volente

Sermon Preach at Stouffville United Church

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“A Simple New Years Resolution”

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Philippians 3:13-14

Have you heard about the man who moved into a retirement community to spend the rest of his life there? It wasn't long until he had made a number of friends among the residents. There was one lady he was especially attracted to and she was attracted to him also. So they spent a lot of time together. Finally one evening he proposed. The next morning he woke up remembering his proposal, but he couldn't remember her answer. So he went and said, "I'm really embarrassed. I proposed to you last night but I can't remember if you said yes or no." "Oh thank goodness!" she replied. "I remembered saying Yes, but I couldn't remember who asked me."

Some times I feel that way about New Year's resolutions. I tell myself, "This year I'm going to turn over a new leaf. I'm going to exercise regularly and lose weight. I'm going to do all kinds of things to improve myself physically and spiritually." But somehow I forget. Maybe you have the problem too.

Do you know what month people give up on their new years resolutions is? It is February. People last only one month. I think it is because they set the mark too high. They expect too much and as a result give up too soon.

I, on the other hand, every year resolve to give up spinach and every year I am successful. Yet, that then presents the problem of setting the mark too low.

So this year I have a suggestion for a New Year's resolution that we ought to be able to remember and keep. It is kind of broad and very general. It is however positive and useful.

I

A simple new years resolution begins by being good to yourself. **Be good to yourself.** Understand your shortcomings—of course. Yet, do not berate yourself because of it. St. Paul said, "Not that I have become perfect. But forgetting what lies behind, I strain forward for what lies ahead. . ."

Paul was being good to himself. He knew his past and he knew he had been given a new beginning so he said to himself and to others as a means of encouragement, "Not that I am perfect but forgetting what lies behind..."

In a Nike advertisement some years ago, a voice came over the television saying, "I've missed more than 9,000 shots in my career. I've lost almost 300 games. Twenty-six times I've been trusted to take the game-winning shot and missed. I've failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed." Those words were spoken by Michael Jordan, by most standards the greatest basketball player ever to play the game.

President Abraham Lincoln

Was defeated for the state legislature in Illinois in 1832

He was defeated for Congress in 1843

He was defeated for Congress again in 1848

He was defeated for the Senate in 1855

He was defeated for Vice presidential ticket in 1856

He was defeated again for the Senate in 1858

He became president in 1860 and lives on history as one of the GREATEST PRESIDENTS IN UNITED STATES.

Why were these people considered great? It was because they didn't let their failures define them. They were good to themselves. They let the past remain the past. Or as St. Paul said, "Forgetting what lies behind..."

II

A simple new year's resolution begins when you decide to be good to yourself, and secondly, **be good to others**. We need to display a positive attitude toward others. Paul said what he said about not being perfect and forgetting what lies behind because he was encouraging others to do the same. He was being good to others offering them what he knew they needed – help and advice.

John Wesley was a great English preacher of the 1700's. He was considered a rather spiffy dresser. One Sunday morning he wore a bow tie that had long ribbons that hung downward. After the sermon was over a lady walked up to him and said, "Brother Wesley, are you open to some criticism?" He said, "I guess so. What would you like to criticize?" She said, "The ribbons on your tie are entirely too long and inappropriate for a man of God." And she took out her scissors and cut them off.

A hush fell over the people standing there as Wesley calmly asked, "Now may I borrow the scissors for a moment?" As she handed them to him, he said, "Ma'am, are you open to some criticism?" She answered, "Well, I suppose I am." He said, "All right then, please stick out your tongue."

This is a hard world, a world that doesn't always exercise courtesy. Sometimes it is a dog-eat-dog world. People are jockeying for positions on the freeways and in their companies, and they're filled with all kinds of stress and anxiety

Robert Schuler wrote, "It would amaze us how many people we could influence for Christ if we would just treat people nicely." I think he is right.

You see, if we treat each other with love then wonderful things will happen for the kingdom of God.

III

I have given you two of the simplest things that you can resolve to do without very much effort; two little things that make a big difference. Let me give you a third. Not only can you resolve this year to be good to yourself and to others, but you can resolve to “**be good to go.**” Now this is a phrase that has come to mean, being ready for anything.

“Forgetting what lies behind I strain forward for what lies ahead, I press on for the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

Why do so many people just mark time, kill time, put in time and not make the most of the time they have. Perhaps one of the reasons is that they give up too soon. They may start out fine. But then they get discouraged because they lose sight of where they are going and what they are supposed to be doing.

I remember Florence Chadwick, aged 34, on July 4, 1952 waded into the water off Catalina Island and began her 21 mile swim toward California. If she completed her journey, she would be the first woman ever to accomplish this feat. The water was ice cold, and the fog was so heavy, that Florence could hardly see the boats in her own party. Sharks often began to attack Florence as she swam and men armed with rifles in the boats surrounding her had to drive them off with carefully aimed shots. But the constant numbing cold of the water was her toughest problem. Fifteen hours after she began, she asked to be taken out, her muscles sluggish and unresponsive due to the frigid water.

Her mother and trainer, alongside in the boat, told her they were near land. They encouraged her not to quit. But as she looked ahead, all she could see was the dense fog.....so she gave up and asked to be taken out of the water. When they pulled her out, she was only a half mile from the California coast! Only a small fraction of her journey was incomplete....she almost did it. Later, when Florence's body began to thaw, the shock of failure finally hit her. To a reporter she blurted out, "Look, I'm not excusing myself. But if I could have *seen* the land, I might have made it."

Two months after her failure, Florence Chadwick walked off the same beach into the same channel and swam the distance, setting a new speed record, because she could see the land.

All of us can identify with Florence. We get discouraged if we can't see where we are going. We get irritated if we feel we are not making any progress in life. That is why if you stand for nothing you will fall for anything.

IV

A simple new year's resolution begins by being good to yourself, being to others being good to go, and finally being **good for something**. If you aim at nothing, you will be sure to hit it.

As believers, however, we already know what we are to be doing and where we are to be going and what our aim is. The question is; are you doing it? As St. Paul said, “Straining forward for the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

Each of us has a “call” on our lives. Each of us has been gifted and blessed with the abilities and talents that are meant to be used for God's glory and the good of others. The only question is; are you using them?

I am only one, but I am one
I cannot do everything, but I can do something
And what I can do, I ought to do.
And what I ought to do, by the grace of God I will do.
I will do more than belong, I will participate
I will do more than be fair, I will be kind
I will do more than believe, I will practice
I will do more than dream, I will work
I will do more than give I will serve
I will do more than live, I will grow
I will do more than be good; I will be good for something.
You think about that. Amen.