

“Attitude without altitude”

January 2008

Hymn God of the sparrow VU 229

Scripture Philippians 2: 1-11

Verses 5-7, ‘Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus; who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant’

Prayer Let us pray – O God, our strength and our guide, we call on you as we enter this new year. We thank you for the joy experienced as we celebrated Jesus’ birth. Help us to know as individuals and as groups of men the direction you would have us take this year that we might truly serve you and our fellow man as we seek to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. Amen.

Lesson A flock of Bohemian waxwings descended on our mountain ash tree. “Flock” sounds pastoral, placid, sheep-like, but these birds showed up like tow trucks converging on a highway accident. One minute the tree was loaded with bright red berries. The next, it was bare and shivering in the winter wind.

The strange thing was they didn’t seem to have a leader. They all arrived at once, they all left at once, as if a single mind motivated them. When they left, they swirled around in the sky, forming and re-forming the constantly changing patterns in a kaleidoscope. First one bird was in front, then another. But they all wheeled and turned together as if they weren’t forty or fifty separate birds at all, but one bird, governed by a single collective mind.

A favourite biblical passage comes in Paul’s letter to the Christian church in Philippi. “Let the same mind be in you,” he wrote, “that was in Jesus Christ.” In simpler terms he was saying, “If Jesus is the head of the church, then all his followers should be so much like him that you even think like him.” We would all be like-minded.

Paul might be dismayed if he could see today’s Christians squabbling with each other about things which make no real difference. I don’t suggest that all members of a faith group should become little robots, mindlessly listening for instructions from their master’s voice. Bland uniformity can be as boring as flavourless pudding.

But think of the impact that a group could have on society if the entire group could act quickly, decisively, and consistently. Compare the effect of one person alone...with a club of thirty men...with a national organization of sixty clubs...with several hundred thousand men of a denomination...

With a true collective consciousness, we could act more like that flock of waxwings. No, not stripping mountain ash trees. But sharing the same ideals, the same values, and then changing the world.

Discussion What are the ideals and values you share within your club?
 What more can we do as a club to help our congregation and community?
 What will we do along with others to help change the world?

Prayer Let us pray – O God, we thank you for Jesus’ example. May we see that example in others. May others see that example in us. Amen.

This meditation is based on material from ‘soft edges’ by Jim Taylor which first ran in January 2000.

Coming events Celebrate the events you have planned for the 85th anniversary of “As One That Serves” with the men of your neighbouring churches.

Book of the month ‘Paul’s letter to the Philippians’

“I Keep Asking”

January 2009

Hymn “God reveal your presence” VU 391

Scripture Ephesians 1: 15 - 23

Prayer Let us pray – We praise you, O God, for fresh winds of the Spirit, for warmth in the winters of our lives, for refreshment in the midst of our weary toil. Thank you, God, for the consolation of your word, the blessing of your peace, the riches of your grace. Shine on us now with the light of your presence and the power of your truth. Meet us here with a fresh revelation of the possibilities in your service. Amen.

Lesson What’s an epiphany? – Perhaps it can be defined as a moment which rescues from the commonplace the radiance of an experience, “the enchantment of the heart.”

As we enter the New Year we could make a “book of epiphanies”. We will not want a scrapbook but a series of pictures for our “hard drive”. Like our camcorder “epiphany machine”, we open ourselves to the moment, “click” and it’s on record, an epiphany! No one epiphany tells the whole story. Even the wise men knew only a part of the story when they left the stable, but they had had an epiphany. Light had broken in their darkness and they would never be the same again.

In our scripture lesson from Paul’s letter to the people of the church in Ephesus we read of Paul’s prayers, how he keeps asking. Sometimes prayer can be like pushing a full wheelbarrow – with no wheel. At other times it’s like rushing down the rapids of a mountain river. What makes the difference? As we have read, Paul’s prayers overflow with praise and thanksgiving. Can reading or praying produce an epiphany?

Migrating Redwing Blackbirds were making a great racket. On investigating, a hundred birds materialized from one tree. One person reported, “I saw a tree, then a rush of colour, then a tree again. It was as if the leaves of the tree had been freed from a spell in the form of Redwing Blackbirds.” For that person, it was an epiphany of the wonder of God’s creation.

It is out of a number of such epiphanies that we shall build our lives into the pattern of Paul’s letter to Ephesus, “the comprehension of what is the breadth and length and depth and height of God’s love.” So that we may be filled – gradually, bit by bit, with the fullness of God.

Discussion In small groups, talk about the following:

- one of your epiphany experiences
- a time that prayer has been difficult for you
- how you can make AOTS and/or the church more a part of your life

Prayer Let us pray – O God, as the songs of Christmas fade, we sometimes turn away from Christ and from your call to service. Lead us back, gracious God, for life apart from you is drained of meaning. Amen

“A New Adventure”

January 2010

Hymn “Onward Christian Soldiers”

Scripture So from now on we don't look at anyone the way the world does. At one time we looked at Christ in that way. But we don't any more.

Anyone who believes in Christ is a new creation. The old is gone! The new has come! It is all from God. He brought us back to himself through Christ's death on the cross. And he has given us the task of bringing others back to him through Christ.

God was bringing the world back to himself through Christ. He did not hold people's sins against them. God has trusted us with the message that people may be brought back to him. So we are Christ's official messengers. It is as if God were making his appeal through us. Here is what Christ wants us to beg you to do. Come back to God!

(2 Corinthians 5:16-20 New International Reader's Version)

Prayer Let us pray – O God, our strength and our guide, we call on you as we enter this New Year. Our hearts are gladdened in your presence. Help us to discover truth and speak it; to feel your glory and to show it; to hear your direction and to follow it, in Jesus name. Amen.

Lesson There is a grand feeling inside us when we sing “Onward Christian Soldiers”. Despite valid objections to its warlike imagery, it remains one of the most popular of all hymns. For many it evokes feelings of the adventurous faith we knew as young people, when all our lives lay ahead of us. The strong words and rousing melody still stir us.

When Jesus says, “Follow me,” and we do so we embark on life's most challenging and demanding venture. What if we respond, “Well yes, but first we must settle the issues of Sunday shopping, our position on native land claims, and how we feel about marriage of homosexual persons.” But the countless issues the church deals with will appear on the agenda in due course. Nothing ends with those first few following steps, but everything begins with them.

Adventure begins with the realization that Jesus is going somewhere. He is on the move. Jesus is more interested in the future than in the past. It is not where we have been that counts but where we are going.

It isn't always easy to accept change. New friends join our circle of relationships; things suddenly aren't the same, and we feel out of balance. We move and the stores and street signs are strange, and we feel uncomfortable. Our financial situation or health alters and we're worried and concerned. We have to learn to do things differently, and we don't like it.

In the Bible, God reveals to us that he is a God of new things, of change and movements. He longs to bring us into a new way of life – a new way of thinking about people and places, a new way of accepting the changes he sets before us.

When we refuse to accept change, we refuse to grow. We miss out on wonderful opportunities. We may even miss out on relationships that could bless us in ways we can't imagine. Even a change that brings limitations can be a chance to be still, to listen to God, to allow others to bless us in new ways.

For some, when they follow Jesus, in some parts of the world it may mean being ostracized, or tortured, or even killed. For others, following Jesus costs far less, but it could mean refusing a bribe that competitors are willing to take, thereby losing a profitable tender. It can mean so minor a matter as taking time to visit a lonely person confined to home. We are not expected to know what may be asked of us before we begin the journey; nor where it will take us. We are expected to understand only that we follow one who will lead us into adventurous living.

Discussion Are you ready for new adventure in your life and in the life of your men's group as we begin this new year?

Prayer Let us pray – Our God, too often we follow at a distance or not at all. When we falter and are uncertain, speak to us with commanding love and help us to become what we were meant to be. Lead our steps into the way of service that lives lived in the shadow of doubt or pain or need may find new hope. We bring our prayers for a world in need and pray that some who follow in the footsteps of Jesus may be led to positions of power and influence, to bring to those offices the strength of your Spirit. In Jesus' name. Amen.

This meditation is based on material from "A time to gather" by Robert A. Wallace and "Devotions from the Heart" by Pamela Kennedy

“*Missional beginnings*”

January 2011

Hymn

“Let all things now living...”

VU 242

Scripture

John 1: 1-9 (The Common English Bible)

In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. The Word was with God in the beginning. Everything came into being through the Word, and without the Word nothing came into being. What came into being through the Word was life and the life was the light for all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness doesn't extinguish the light.

A man named John was sent from God. He came as a witness to testify concerning the light, so that through him everyone would believe in the light. He himself wasn't the light, but his mission was to testify concerning the light.

The true light that shines on all people was coming into the world.

Prayer

Let us pray together – God of the universe, the world is full of change and rebirth, of new beginnings. You call us to grow, to develop and to endure. Be with us in the changing patterns of our lives and our world. Give us courage to face the unknown, knowing that you walk with us in all the stages of our journeys. Amen

Reflection

Like the beginning of a job, or the beginning of a marriage, or the beginning of a school semester, or the beginning of life in a new community, or the beginning of a family, the beginning of a new year creates a time for us to stop and think and plan and begin to move in an untested direction.

“Lord, I don't really feel like praying. I'm confused, everything is confused. I don't know what I'll be doing next year – I don't even know for sure what I want to be doing next year, or what I should be doing. I feel guilty praying – turning to you at a time like this because I feel two-faced to pray only when I need help and not to pray when I don't.” wrote Henri Nouwen in his book *The Selfless Way of Christ*.

Chaim Potok in his novel, *In the Beginning*, opens with the thought, “All beginnings are hard...teaching the way I do it is particularly hard, for I touch the raw nerves of faith, the beginnings of things...I say to them what was said to me, ‘be patient. You are learning a new way...All beginnings are hard’.”

In the gospel of John, the author was writing for those brought up in the Greek culture of much of the civilized world around him. He begins with “the Word”, our translation for what the Greeks thought of as the creative and life-giving principle behind the universe. Greek philosophy held it to be the instrument through which our world was called into being and held together, ‘the thought of God stamped upon the universe’.

So John begins his writing with the astonishing statement that the divine principle has become a man, that the Word has come to life, and entered the world as one of us. That same Jesus of Nazareth, whose story John is about to tell, is God's word to us. He comes to bring light and life to the dark places of our lives, even as God's creative

work brought light and order into primeval darkness and chaos at the formation of the world.

As we read in the gospel, John was sent into the world so that everyone in the world would believe in the light. He was aware of his specific mission. His mission was to testify concerning the light.

Beginnings give us strangely mixed feelings of anticipation and uneasiness. We ask, "What will be my role this year? Do I have a mission? Am I ready to commit to new responsibilities?" We listen for the inner voice bidding us to act, and then we put aside the hesitation and respond to God's nudging. In the response the energy comes. Grace always comes in transit. Our part is simply to begin. A Greek sage once said, "He has half the deed done who has made a beginning." New beginnings make new life.

Discussion As Nouwen says, more or less for all of us, how do we know what direction we will take, or what direction we want to take, or what direction we should be taking? And should we be calling on God for those directions? And is it acceptable for us to call on God only when we want help?

Closing prayer Let us pray – God of mystery and wonder, we try to understand the changing patterns of our world and of our lives. Make us aware that you are with us in the new, as you were in the old. Give us a sense of your presence in our new-found patterns and help us to walk in peace and joy through all the fords and forks on our journey. Amen.

January 2014

Hymn 253 Be thou my vision

Scripture; Geneses 3: 1-6 & Matthew 6:33-34

Reflection:

Well New Years Eve, at least in our modern world, is a time to celebrate. Celebrate past victories, leave a bad year behind if that fits, and more importantly look to the future. We can suggest that was what God was doing “In The beginning”, was looking forward to a new beginning, even akin to a new resolution. . Like us making New Years resolutions Adam & Eve ignored God & broke his resolution. We look back over the last year and wonder if we did the same as Adam & Eve, , then look ahead and promise to do better. A new beginning always feels good, and usually we sincerely believe we will honour our commitment, only to find the next morning that giving up smoking is harder than we thought, that being nice to aunt Lucy is not really an option. The only thing that is clear is we will not suffer another hang over. It takes guts, determination and a lot of will power to keep our promises for a new beginning. Just think how tough it would be if, like Adam & Eve, we had a snake to egg us on. So the solution for most of us, focus on that new beginning, not the end of it but the journey. “Therefor take no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the is the evil thereof.”Amen

Discussion.

Each year is really a new beginning, but for what: do you resolve to stop smoking....drink less....be nicer to your relatives.....or be a better person & be a real follower of Jesus teachings? If it is the latter, how do we accomplish that?

Hymn 304 “ O Jesus I have promised” Vs 1 and 4

Prayer, well God, yes another year. Another time to resolve to follow your example, to do as you taught. You know our resolve is sincere, but our humanity is weak, we need and ask for your help” your help to make us the person we want to be, to keep those commitments to you and to ourselves. Be with us lord as we go about our daily tasks and be our conscience as we try to do as you taught. Amen

Give Peace & Love a Chance

Devotion for January 2015

Hymn: VU 105 Dust and Ashes.....

Scripture: Isaiah 40:31

Reflection:

Black Friday, Cyber Monday, Boxing day, all finally behind us. I just think of people buying stuff they don't need with money they don't have. The new electronic gadget is probably on the fritz, the shiny made in China toys broken, the chocolates and wine all consumed and now they face the new year with the CR CD demands arriving. The Christmas child, the spirit of love for everyone, the goodwill, all retreat and life gets back to normal. For whatever reason the world of love and peace is probably further away for the world than it has ever been. Perhaps 2015 will fare better: people may actually listen, learn and as the Beatles wrote, "All you need is Love" and John Lennon wrote "Give Peace a Chance".

Discussion: Did Jesus really just waste his time?

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 5:17

Hymn....Imagine by John Lennon....Not in any kind of hymnal but I think very appropriate to start off a new year. So, someone bring in a CD and whatever equipment needed and just listen to the words and let it sink in.

Prayer: Well God we are starting again, a new year, new promises and new beginnings for many things. All we ask is your guidance, your help to help us make the world a better place. Let there finally be peace. amen

Clean Out the Old and Start Anew

Devotion for January 2016

Hymn: VU 562 Jesus Calls us

Scripture: Isaiah 43:18-19 2 Corinthians 5:17 & Ephesians 4: 22-24

Reflection:

In our culture January is a time to clean out the old and start anew. For some that means stuff, and for others that means turfing our old habits, old ways of thinking, resolving to kick the smoking and other various injurious habits. We are usually pretty good at this renewal stuff, at least for a few weeks and even longer, but slowly most of us usually drift back and be and act like we always have. Since there was no Christmas and no New Years as we know it, in the bible I wondered what it had to say about renewal: quite a lot as it turns out.

Discussion:

Should New Years have any special meeting for us? Why wait till Jan 1 to make changes in our lives, or is it just a human response that we pick on New Year's rather than say, our birthday or just any time we feel we need to smarten up and change?

Hymn VU 568 Dear Lord Lead me.....

Prayer:

Jesus, New Years, August or November we rely on your faith in us and your to grace to enable us to change, to live the lives we should. We thank you.

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“Recognize Our Past Mistakes”

January 2017

Hymn VU 104 We have Come at Christ's Own Bidding vs 1 & 3

Scripture; Jeremiah 29:11 and Philippians 3:13-14

Reflection:

Both scriptures speak of looking to the future for hope and looking forward and not back. Someone much wiser than I, said something akin to, “we cannot know our future if we forget our past”. I think he was suggesting if we don't recognize our past errors and mistakes so we can correct them we will never go forward. The bible is telling us that the future is brighter and don't be afraid because our real future is in meeting Jesus. For some it is a real exercise to shake off the past and start anew, but that is what we expect in the new year. So, let's look forward with hope. Amen

Discussion:

Views about the bible, about religion in general, have changed greatly in the last few years. In the lobby of our apartment building just a few days ago I overheard a conversation, “there is no heaven nor hell”! This came from a 75 year old female. A devout Catholic gentleman, about the same age, just sat with a sly smile on his face, as if to say, sorry lady but you have no idea! What about you?

Hymn VS 118 Wonder & Stare

Prayer: Well God, you have given us another year. Traditionally January is the time to reflect, look back and resolve to do better this year, to look ahead with hope as the scripture says. We are sometimes weak and ask for your grace, your guidance, your help, to shake off last year's bad habits and look forward not just with hope, but with a positive attitude and actions. Amen