

Sermon 123117 New Year
Scripture John 1: 1-17
Sermon Title- A Prayer for the New Year

Gathering for the last time in the year brings us to an intersection of emotions. We may look back with a mix of pride and regret among other feelings. Fear and hope for the New Year are in the mix as we face another new beginning. There is anxiety about all the bad things that could happen to us that coexists with dreams of what a blessed future might be in store for us. We live in a time of economic uncertainty, random violence, war, corruption, terrorism, and rising poverty. We once again hope that this will be the year when the human race finally gets it right and learns to live as God intended us to live.

This is also the time for many of an odd ritual called, “making my New Years resolution.” I will tell you my New Years resolution. I started making this resolution over twenty years ago and I have stuck with it every year. My New Years resolution is to not make New Years resolutions. I made this decision base on the fact that back in the days when I made New Years resolutions I consistently could not remember what my resolution was by the end of January. Instead, this year, I have a prayer for the New Year. That fits who I am now and I believe is more appropriate.

A lot of people who are unfamiliar with prayer think that prayer is asking God for things or even begging for things from God. These people tend to try prayer and usually give up when God doesn't deliver

on their requests. A child might have prayed for a bicycle, but didn't get a bicycle, or if he did get a bike, had reason to believe that it wasn't God who gave it to him. A young person might pray to get a boyfriend or a girlfriend, then got one which resulted in not questioning God's power but questioning God's taste. An older person might pray for a favorable report from the doctor, and sometimes they got it and sometimes they didn't, but they had trouble seeing where prayer affected the outcome.

So praying *for* something is not really what prayer is about. We pray *to* God and often we pray *with* others. A lot of prayers are meant for human ears as much as for God. They are meant for us. They remind us to be grateful. They help us to remember God's presence in our lives. There is often an element of wishing in prayer that life and the world will be good or better coupled with the recognition that God has a role in that. I guess this prayer is in the category of 'wish' prayers that might be more geared toward the ear of humans than the ear of God.

Here is my first prayer request. If I could change one thing about the world for this coming year it would be that every human being comes to recognize that certain things are wrong and should not be done. Hurting people is wrong. Cheating people is wrong. Along with that, any religion that endorses, even celebrates the murder of innocent people is wrong and a false religion. Even someone who has been treated unjustly does not have the license to treat others unjustly. Some things

are simply wrong, not just illegal, or inappropriate, or unwise- but wrong.

Movies, TV, pop psychology, and pop culture teach us that feelings are more important than anything else. Feelings have become self-justifying. Someone is asked, “Why did you do that?” The person responds, “Because I was angry” or “I was tired” or “I don’t think my father loved me enough.” This is not just used as an explanation but as a justification. This is about the dastardly word, ‘rationalization.’ ‘Rationalize’ means persuading yourself (and trying to persuade others) that something is all right- when you really know that it isn’t. May all of God’s creatures come to understand that some things, no matter how tempting or emotionally satisfying they may be, are wrong and should not be done.

A wish for the New Year is that toughness and ruthlessness in business and politics are no longer admired and rewarded, but kindness and forgiveness become the chief currency of success.

I pray that people show the honor to each other that God has granted to all of us by accepting us into creation. Employing a simple word, ‘respect’, can do this. Pundits and politicians, instead of calling the opposing party wrong, often depict the other side as evil, risky, and dangerous. This toxic attitude has infiltrated society. We now have a culture of suspicion. I pray that this suspicion of others as an approach to human relationships disappears in the New Year. The idea that the boss,

for example, is out to “get” employees instead of trying to improve the situation, is ridiculous. It may happen, but most people are trying their best to do the right thing. Now, they may be clumsy or not very good at what they do, or not a nice person, but the intentions are usually good. Let’s give each other that level of respect that our intentions are good. May the people who don’t have good intentions identify themselves quickly. Honor and respect all God’s creatures and be an honorable and respected person. That honor and respect, pray God, is not only for other people but also for all of creation.

In this coming year, may tolerance be an earmark of life. May the idea that our group is the right group and everyone else gets it wrong disappear. I speak of religious tolerance, racial and ethnic tolerance, and life-style tolerance. May diversity be celebrated in the world.

In this coming year, may this world become a world in which good people will feel at home. I pray for a world that will give good people, and will give God, reasons to say, “This is my kind of place.”

The memory is still fresh of the despicable act of mass shootings that was done on innocent country music concert goers in Las Vegas. Firstly, we must recognize that evil does exist in the world. Yet, we must also recognize the outpouring of people who didn’t know the victims. The care, sympathy, and support by fellow citizens answered that cruel act. This is a world that I can live in.

I believe that. I know all the kindness, comfort, and prayers of those people did not really balance out the despicable act by one cruel and sick person. It helps, but it doesn't make up for it. But despite that fact that evil does and will likely continue to exist, there is hope and goodness to push back on evil. Kindness and heroism run rampant in this world and I gotta believe that God sees that as very good. With all its horror and brokenness, it is still a beautiful world. It's far from perfect, but it is still good.

We pray that this coming year will give good people everywhere reason to rejoice, that the world will echo with the laughter of children, the rejoicing of families, and the benediction of the Creator. May every person on this spaceship earth, even if fleeting, have the experience of love, forgiveness, compassion, and peace. May gratefulness overcome resentment. May generosity overcome selfishness. May virtue overcome sin. May God look down upon God's children and see that they honor God and honor each other. May God look down upon the year 2018 and declare it very good. AMEN