

“God Makes All Things New”

Date: December 31, 2017

Place: Lakewood UMC

Occasion: New Year’s Eve

Theme: Change, New year-new you

Texts: 2 Corinthians 5:1-21; Revelation 21:5; Philippians 3:13, 4:13

Most of us will not have the unique opportunity of Alfred Nobel, who read his own obituary. It happened because of a mistaken identity. Alfred’s brother died, but the news media had confused the name and believed it was Alfred who had died.

As he read his own obituary, he was horrified to find that he was referred to as “the dynamite king.” He was pictured as someone who had spent his entire life gathering a fortune from the manufacture of weapons of destruction. And this really bothered him.

When he invented dynamite, he thought it would be an instrument of peace, and he believed that no one would want to use such deadly power. But when he read his own obituary, he learned that others saw him much differently than he saw himself.

As far as the public knew, dynamite was his whole life. There was nothing in his obituary that spoke of his efforts to break down barriers that separated people. He was merely depicted as a merchant of death.

And so he made a new resolution. In his last will and testament, he made great sums of money available, resulting in the Nobel Peace Prize, the most valued of awards given to those who have done the most to advance the cause of world peace.

What will they say about you when you’re gone? Are you pleased with the way you’ve lived your life thus far? Or maybe a better question would be, “Is God pleased with the way you have lived your life thus far?”

The Good News of Jesus Christ is that we are not condemned by our

past, nor are we condemned to keep repeating the past. We can change; we can be different; there is hope. Paul says in Philippians 3:13: “Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.” Forgetting what is past, I move forward.

Near the end of the year, many people think about making New Year’s resolutions, resolving to do some things differently in the coming year. Today we are on the brink of a brand new year. Perhaps you have thought about resolutions. Or maybe you are one of the people who have given up making resolutions, because you’ve not had good success in keeping them in the past.

Many people want to lose weight, exercise more, quit smoking, change a bad habit, or start some healthy habits. Is it possible to change habits like yesterday’s clothes? The truth is real change isn’t that simple. Too many people look for easy solutions and quick fixes.

Change is a lot more complicated and challenging than simply writing down a goal and hoping it will happen. And it usually takes a lot longer than most people are willing to give it. And so they get frustrated and quit trying. If you’ve tried in the past to make some changes in your life, and you’ve quit because you weren’t successful, hear the good news, you’re not alone.

One study showed that most people set the same goal or make the same New Year’s resolution for three years in a row before they actually make any real changes. As human beings, change is a slow process. But we shouldn’t give up hope. Remember Philippians 3:13 –

“Forgetting what is behind, we press on toward the goal for which God has called us heavenward in Christ Jesus.” Let’s forget the past, and start anew today.

And for all of you who are thinking about setting goals, making new year’s resolutions, or who simply want to change some habits in the new year, I want to offer one bit of advice that most change plans do not include: Don’t try to do it alone.

One author put it this way: “Using personal power to try to bring about deep, persistent change is like trying to use an AA battery to power a jet liner; it just isn’t up to the task.

Too many self-help books talk about “inner strength,” “pulling your own strings,” “you can do it attitudes.” We’ve been made to think that if we just put our minds to it, we can do anything. And then, when we fail, we feel guilty and full of shame. And we wonder, “What’s wrong with me? Why did I fail?” And we label ourselves as failures.

For deep and lasting change, we can’t depend on our own efforts; we have to turn to God. In many ways we have to offer up a clean slate of expectations and plans, and let God control the outcome. Giving up control is difficult. Really letting God take us where God wants us to go means that we no longer call the shots.

But when we’re willing to turn our lives over to God, we find that change comes in unexpected ways. We learn to live by grace, rather than by trying to control all that we can and being frustrated by what we can’t. It’s about surrendering our life to God and letting God call the shots.

Philippians 4:13 tells us, “I can do all things through Christ who gives me the strength.” Here is the source of the Christian’s power and strength – it’s a life lived in Christ Jesus. But let’s not get confused by thinking that

we can set the agenda and tell Jesus what we want him to do for us. It's really the other way around. We say to Jesus, "Here is my life. Tell me what you want from me. Guide me; show me; direct me. My life is yours."

In Revelation 21:5 we read – "And the One who was seated on the throne said, "See I am making all things new. Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true." I like the verb tense that is used; it's progressive, showing a continual process. God is in the process of making all things new. That offers all of us hope.

We don't have to be discouraged with our progress, because God isn't finished with us yet. John Wesley would ask his disciples if they were going on to perfection. That seems like an unlikely goal that would discourage most people.

But if we take his question in the light of God's continuing work in each of us, we take encouragement. God is still working on each of us. I can honestly say that by the grace of Christ and His continual, daily help, I am going on to perfection as I continue my faith journey in Christ.

As we prepare to welcome the New Year, let us make room for the new. We must let go of all the guilt and the shame and the pressure and the fear of failure. "Should's" and "ought's" add to the pressure we put on ourselves.

Love wins out over guilt every time. Instead of shaming ourselves into new life, may we surrender ourselves to God and allow God "to make all things new." Let us say "yes" to God and see what God does in our lives. But we must be patient. God's time is not our time.

Jesus said, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and all these other things will take care of themselves." In this coming New Year, may we

allow God access to our hearts, so God can do what God wants to do, to bring the kingdom of God into reality, in each of our lives. Amen? Amen!

I'd like to close by reading a poem, the author is unknown. It's titled, "A Great Recipe for the New Year." It goes like this:

Fold two hands together, and express a dash of sorrow.
Marinate it overnight, and work on it tomorrow.

Chop one grudge in tiny pieces, add several cups of love.
Dredge with a large size smile, mix with the ingredients above.

Dissolve the hate within you, by doing a good deed.
Cut in and help your friend, if he or she should be in need.

Stir in laughter, love and kindness, from the heart it has to come.
Toss with genuine forgiveness, and give your friends some.

The amount of people served will depend on you.
It can serve the whole wide world, if you really want it to!