

From the Pastor:

I don't know about you, or even whether you made any New Year's resolutions, but I have not been particularly stellar about keeping my "goals." I figured if they were called "goals," they would be easier to keep than "resolutions." I have been better about making healthy choices with eating but I still haven't managed to include regular (okay, any) exercise into my daily/weekly habits. I am better about taking some time away each week but still often don't, even though it is better for my family, my congregation and myself to do so.

What has your experience been? Are you still working on your goals? We laugh about it and sometimes we stop even making the commitment. Why? Our struggle to follow through on our commitments to improve ourselves reveals a universal human struggle. We are in good company. Even Paul, the apostle, confessed: "What I don't understand about myself is that I decide one way, but then I act another, doing things I absolutely despise." (Romans 7:15 Message)

Part of the problem is that we believe that we can change ourselves simply by changing our thinking. While there is some truth to this, when it comes to decision-making, it's not our minds that are in control so much as our hearts. Often we are driven more by what our hearts hope will give us a "good life".

The problem is that our hearts have a mixed track record at choosing what brings life. We easily fall prey to the attractions of things that promise satisfaction or fulfillment or nurture, but ultimately disappoint. (That may be the box of Thin Mints or too much comfort food or shopping or alcohol or even exercising. All things fine in moderation but that also can become a substitution for a deeper fulfillment.) What we need is a vision of a life that is truly good, and we need that vision to capture our hearts so that it becomes the central, motivating force in our lives.

The vision that I trust to meet these requirements is the Reign of God (or the Kingdom of God)

that Jesus taught about so frequently. It's the vision of human life that was preached and lived by Jesus – a life of unselfish love, compassionate grace, demanding justice and forgiving peace.

So, how do we become captured and directed by the Reign of God? That is one of the primary functions of worship. As we gather each week, our songs, prayers, liturgies, and sacraments and speak to us of a different reality. They remind us that another world is possible. There is another way to live than what the dominant messages suggest: a way of being shaped by grace, love, justice and peace.

As this vision fills our hearts and minds, we begin to see that the Reign of God is the source of the abundant life that Jesus promised – not just for us, but for all. We begin to experience that living God's way can change everything – not just us but also our families and communities.

We learn or rehearse in worship some of the words and the habits of life in the Reign of God. Where the rubber hits the road is making what we practice on Sunday continue on Monday and beyond. Our hope is that the words and acts that we learn and practice in worship will direct our words and acts towards all people. For in the words of Jesus: "They will know you are my disciples by your love" (John 13:35).

God's blessings on us all as we travel deeper into the Reign of God this year!

Pastor Lynn