

Newsletter Reflection for January 2017

It seems unreal that it is time to say good bye to another year. This past year has been one which has seen many things which bring home the brokenness of our world—how far we are from living into the tenets of our faith based on God’s call to love and serve one another as integral to our discipleship. As the latest self-absorbed invitation on Facebook asks us to post our pictures from 2016 in album form, it announces we have completed another trip around the sun. Traditionally this time of year is for reflection on past behaviors and making resolutions about behaviors and/or actions to be taken in this coming year that will change or improve those of the past. Perhaps there will soon be postings about resolutions for changes to be carried into this new year of 2017. The making of resolutions, even though most of them do not result in long lasting changes in our behavior, requires that we spend some time thinking about that behavior. At the moment the focus seems to be a self-centered look at the past, not a reflective look at what was done but an attempt at immortalization. In our society during the 2016 trip around the sun there has been an upsurge in expressions of hatred—hatred based on race, religion, ethnicity,...all those things which make someone different from the group which is uttering the expression. Hearing all these things, throughout the year, but even during the Advent season has demonstrated how far we are from the ability to keep Christ in Christmas. It is not only the cultural secularization which makes the season more about things of this world than God’s coming reign. It is also our inability to live into the commandment that Jesus gave that we were to love one another; that we were to love even our enemies; that we were to care and tend to the needs of the other, whoever we define that to be. Many of the resolutions made at this time of the year tend to be focused on ways we think will improve our self—becoming thinner by diet, giving up bad habits like smoking, taking up an exercise program. These are goals which will improve our physical health. These are goals which we perhaps need to set. But on December 25th we celebrated the birth of the Christ child so long ago. With that celebration, the season of Advent preparation officially came to an end. The last candle on the Advent Wreath was lit. With that we entered into the Christmas season which in the church continues until January 6th (Epiphany). Christ is here and preparation is behind us. But is it really? One of the themes of Advent for Christians is that we are still waiting for Christ to come; that we are not just preparing a commemoration for the historical event which happened over two thousand years ago but for that future coming of Christ. Advent is also to prepare us to be ready for that. As we begin this new journey around the sun perhaps we need to continue working on those things represented by the candles we lit during the Advent season. If we make **hope** the cornerstone of this New Year; hope based on trust in the promises of God, then perhaps we can let go of the fear we carry with us. If we let go of those fears, then we may be able to live into the things we know Christ desires of us. When we place our hope and trust in God and God’s promises, then we can find the **peace** which Jesus said he was giving to his disciples; the peace which comes amid upheaval and the distractions of the world. This peace does not mean that the conflict in the world, nor the hatred so prevalent in the world will cease, but it does mean that I can respond to the conflict, the prejudice and other negative,

non-loving things without reacting judgmentally or in kind. With hope and peace within, then **joy** becomes a part of our life. I can cultivate hope, peace and joy in my life by seeking to discern the ways God is acting in this broken world. To actively seek the ways God is working in this world and seek to participate in them, brings the ability to feel God's presence more closely. The last of the Advent candles symbolized God's love. Love in some ways both begins and ends the circle which is formed around the Advent wreath. That God so loved the world is the reason for creation, for the incarnation, for the crucifixion and the resurrection. Love is the force more powerful than all others. Love is the force which sustains all the others which are part of our lives as faithful disciples of the "One who came and is still the One to come." Love is what we are called to exhibit in this broken world as witnesses to the love which we have been given. We are called to demonstrate that despite the many differences among us, each and every individual is precious in God's sight and is a beloved child. In other words as we enter this year of 2017 we need to **prayerfully** make resolutions which will keep us prepared and ready for that awaited return of Christ whose incarnation we just celebrated. I will close this reflection which sums up my resolution for the 2017 with this wish for Shalom for all who read this. Shalom is both a word of greeting and a word at parting which expresses the desire, the wish that the recipient of the word be truly whole. It is the expressed wish for wellness of the other not only in body, but in mind and spirit. I wish Shalom for you in this New Year.

Pastor Libby