

Newsletter Reflections for January

As we near the end of December, we begin to think in two ways about time and events looking back and forward. We reflect on the events of the year that is coming to a close; the events both national and personal which have happened since last January. Some events of the last twelve months will have ripple effects into the year which will begin in this coming January. This January, 2020 actually marks the third decade of this century; so it begins not only a new year but a new decade. Some effects of events in this coming year will last far longer than the year 2020. Some will make no more than a brief “breaking news splash”, if that, in the hectic pace of the world news scene. At this point we have no way to judge which events will have the greater impact on us, on those we love and on our nation. Sometimes the events having the greatest impact on us will make no impact on the world. Some of those which will change the world for many do not intrude on our personal lives. No one who lived in Palestine at the time of the birth of the child whose birth we are celebrating as I write this reflection had any way of knowing the ripple effects which God set in motion with that birth. That event is still reverberating through the world today. It will continue to do so until God chooses to bring an end to all things as they currently exist according to God’s own time table. That is one of the realities we reflect upon during the season of Advent as we begin the church’s New Year both celebrating the redemption event God set in motion and anticipating the concluding chapter yet to come. That other tendency at this time of year is to look forward into that New Year. We do this with both predictions about the future and resolutions about changing our behaviors. We wonder what this New Year will bring; whether the news of the days to come will be good or tragic. Most resolutions made are those which involve changing our individual behaviors. Studies show that most of those resolutions are not kept very long into the new year, often not lasting even until February. This is especially true of those ambitious plans involving radically changing our personal habits. Resolutions made casually which depend upon our own power of self-control and self-discipline and self-will in matters to alter selfish behaviors are not likely to be met with a great deal of success. That tends to be what studies of these “New Year Resolutions” indicate. These resolutions range from to “exercise more” or to “lose weight” or to just to be “kinder” or to “be a better person” without designing any actual plan of action to implement the change proposed in the resolution. Although evidently “gym” memberships peak in January, attendance usually declines to pre-January levels by the end of February. This looking ahead does point out a possibility which is there each year. What each new year does bring, whether we take advantage of it or not, is 365 new opportunities. In fact, this year, there is a bonus of an extra opportunity as there are 366 days (February has 29 days as 2020 is a Leap Year). On January 1, 2020 you have an opportunity to make of that day whatever you wish. The day is a new one. It is a gift. The decision is yours each and every day to make about what to do about the opportunity that the day presents to you. You can decide to basically repeat exactly what you did the day before or you can decide to approach this day

differently. Of course, there are connections to the previous day, but you have the opportunity to begin it with a fresh attitude. You have the opportunity to begin with gratitude, thinking of your blessings. That is the possibility of new days, of new beginnings...the opportunity present within it to set a new agenda...to make a difference in the situation around you by looking at it differently. This may not radically change the world, but it may radically change your own environment. As we start this New Year all those 366 opportunities are there before us, coming one at a time. When January 2nd arrives, then this year there are still 365 days containing opportunity ahead of us. Opportunity we have when choices that we make can make a difference in our life and in the life of someone else. Even at the end of January, there are 335 days for opportunity to make something good happen in that day that comes new each morning. As the days pass, as the months move forward into spring and then summer we tend to forget the newness of each day and the opportunity of it. If we make any resolutions for this coming year, perhaps a good one would be to remember that the newness begins again with the dawn of each new day that God provides and opportunities await.

Shalom,

Pastor Libby