



Just How Dedicated Are You?

FIRST UNITED

METHODIST CHURCH

*An Open-Spirited Community
of Faith and Action*

I chuckled at a blog writer who looked back over previous years' resolutions:

- 2007: I will get my weight down below 180.
- 2008: I will get below 190.
- 2009: I will get below 200.
- 2010: I will walk at least a mile every day.
- 2011: I will try to develop a realistic attitude about my weight.
- 2012: I will try to drive past a gym at least once a week.

Some friends go regularly to a gym and were groaning that it's going to be hard to have room to work out in the gym for about a month because of all the New Year's Resolutions to get in shape in 2012. They consoled each other, saying by late January or early February things will be back to normal. Noble as those resolutions are, I guess people aren't so good at follow-through.

All this prompted me to ask myself this question: "Just how dedicated are you?" Not to resolutions. How dedicated are you, Larry, to the God who made all creation, and each one of us...

Dedicated - devoted to a cause, ideal or purpose; "a dedicated dancer"; "dedicated teachers"; "dedicated to the proposition that all are created equal"- A. Lincoln; solemnly set apart for a high purpose How dedicated are you?

I wish I could make this first sermon of the new year be a call to strengthen our resolve, our dedication. Truth is, the Scriptures lead us to a different place: The Scriptures for today tell us that all is grace.

Luke tells us Mary and Joseph dedicated Jesus in the temple. He says they stood with Jesus wrapped in swaddling clothes there in the holiest of places. They followed the word from the Angel to name him Jesus, or Yeshua. That name usually is translated as "God's salvation", "Yahweh saves", or (the translation I like the best) "Yahweh is salvation."

They probably had no idea how their baby, born in obscurity, would live out his name. Through Jesus God brought atonement, "at-one-ment", of humanity with God.

Some Christians call this day, January 1, the "Feast of the Holy Name of Jesus." I like "New Year's Communion," because it is about so much more than a naming ritual observed in a temple 2,000 years ago by a devout family. This is a fresh start in living in union – co-union with Christ: It is total grace:

"Jesus" is not just a belief system., or a concept.

It is not just a way of life. It is a very change in our identities.

Those are the words of the new Episcopal Bishop in Nebraska, Scott Barker.

I wish I could make this first sermon of the new year be a call to dedication, I would love to urge us all to new heights of accomplishment by committing to keep those resolutions.

Truth is, all is grace.

This is the way to start the New Year: "**Accept the fact that you are accepted.**"

Paul Tillich's words grabbed hold of me almost 40 years ago and have helped me in so many ways:

"Accept the fact that you are accepted by that which is greater than you.

...Do not seek for anything, do not perform anything, do not intend anything. Simply accept the fact that you are accepted!"

In Galatians, Paul says God offers grace that is unconditional, unmerited, universal, relentless, and eternal.

**God sent the Son, born of a woman, under the law,
in order to redeem those who were under the law,
so that we may receive adoption as children....
So you are no longer a slave but a child,
and if a child then also an heir, through God.**

Luke tells us the story through the eyes of Simeon. He is faithful, waiting for the redemption of Israel, He wants his own people to be saved. He prays day and night in the temple to live to see this.

The moment he sees the baby he expands the Good News the angels that sang to the shepherds. He says that salvation is coming through this baby as a light to all peoples.

**³⁰for my eyes have seen your salvation,
³¹which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,
³²a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."**

**There is something surprising about the appearance of salvation,
something which contradicts pious opinions and intellectual
demands. The mystery of salvation is the mystery of a child.
A child is real, and not yet real, it is in history and not yet historical.
It's nature is visible and invisible, it is here and not yet here.
And just this is the character of salvation.
Salvation has the nature of a child. - Paul Tillich**

How dedicated are you? The answer is simple: you are completely, unconditionally, eternally dedicated. The One who made all Creation, our God, dedicates all of God's self to you and you are completely Dedicated by God to God.

God's dedication to us makes it possible for us dedicate ourselves to God. That is clear in Wesley's Covenant Prayers, which we will share today.

It all starts with God blessing us with co-union, communion.

We are heirs, adopted full members of the family of God, Paul says, so the universal love that became real in that baby born long ago is ours.

So when we can our worship today singing "Come Thou Fount," we can nod our heads and say yes it is true, "Prone to wander, Lord I feel it," and not be worried or bothered that we are in any way a failure when we do. We might have short attention span. It's okay. We can miss opportunities. It's okay. We have faults and failures. We will be restored to the One who is completely and eternally dedicated to us.

"Here's my heart, O take and seal it" is our grateful response. My prayer is:

May we all grow in my dedication to the One who has dedicated all to you and me and everyone and everything in all Creation.

WESLEY'S COVENANT PRAYER *John Wesley, c. 1780*

Commit yourselves to Christ as his disciples.
Give yourselves to him, that you may belong to him.
Christ has many services to be done. Some are easy and honorable, others are more difficult and disgraceful.
Some are suitable to our inclinations and interests, others are contrary to both. In some we may please Christ and please ourselves.

In some we cannot please Christ except by denying ourselves.

Let us, therefore, go to Christ, and pray:

**I am thy servant, no longer my own, but thine.
I give myself fully unto thy will in all things.
put me to doing, put me to suffering,
let me be employed for thee, or laid aside for thee,
let me be full, let me be empty,
let me have all things, let me have nothing.
I freely and heartily yield all things to thy pleasure.
And now, O glorious and blessed God,
Creator, Christ and Holy Spirit,
Thou art mine and I am thine. So be it,
and the covenant I have made on earth
let it be ratified in heaven. Amen.**

EPISTLE SCRIPTURE GALATIANS 4:4-7

But when the fullness of time had come,
God sent the Son, born of a woman, under the law,
⁵in order to redeem those who were under the law,
so that we may receive adoption as children.
⁶and because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of the Son into our hearts,
crying, "Abba! Father!"

⁷So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.

THE GOSPEL Luke 2:19-38 [[¹⁹Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.]]

²¹After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

²²When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord²

³(as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord"),²

⁴and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."

²⁵Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. ²⁶It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah.

²⁷Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law,

²⁸Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

²⁹"Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word;

³⁰for my eyes have seen your salvation,

³¹which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,

³²a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."

[[³³And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him.

³⁴Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary,

"This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed³⁵ so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed- and a sword will pierce your own soul too."

³⁶There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher.

She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage,³⁷ then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. ³⁸She came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.]]