

The Resolution to End All Resolutions

Luke 2:41-52

Does anyone come down to breakfast on January 1 and announce "I'm so hungry, I feel as if I haven't eaten since last year!"?

It's fun to play with all the brand-new possibilities open to you on January 1. Go jogging on January 1 and you've exercised every day that year. Get through lunch without eating potato chips or a candy bar, and that whole new healthy diet regime is on track.

On January 1 you may be able to say that you didn't cuss at anyone, didn't yell at the kids, flossed every day, didn't throw your dirty clothes on the bathroom floor and read the Bible every morning!

On January 1 your whole life can be transformed. For one day at least, all your good intentions can be jump-started, and all your bad habits can be unplugged. At least for a few hours (or minutes?), the year is a perfect reflection of your best self.

But January 1 is followed by January 2 and January 3. There will come a day where you'll opt to stay in a cozy bed a few more minutes rather than plunging out into the cold on that jog. There will come a day where candy wrappers will start appearing in your desk drawer again.

By the 4th or 5th, you may have been aggravated enough at a bad driver or a dropped glass or a stubbed toe that you let loose a blue streak of colorful words or unsanctified thoughts. By the 7th, your socks are back on the bathroom floor and your dental floss is gathering dust. By the 10th you'll be asleep before you can even get the Bible open.

For all but a few of us, New Year's resolutions get packed away with the last of the Christmas decorations. By Epiphany our behavior and the whole New Year are just as tarnished as they were on December 31.

The problem with **most of our resolutions is that they're too safe, too sensible and too self-centered.** We resolve to make tiny cosmetic changes in our lifestyles but refuse to consider restructuring our lives and changing the paradigms by which we live.

Luke's single story about the boy Jesus offers us an example of what it would mean if we were to transform our lives by making the ultimate resolution, the mother of all New Year's resolutions, the resolution that ends all resolutions - to declare that from this day forward we will be "about [our] Father's business."

Joseph and Mary, their friends, neighbors and relatives, all made the required pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the Passover feast. But as soon as the allotted time for the holiday was over, they hit the road anxious to get back to all the chores and responsibilities that had filled their lives. Joseph, a craftsman working with stone and wood, undoubtedly had projects awaiting his attention. Mary would have had the hundreds of time-consuming tasks it took to keep her family fed and clothed. Like most of us at the end of an extended vacation, they were probably looking forward to getting back to the comfortable familiarity of their own hearth and home.

But the young Jesus refused to let his relationship with God be regulated according to some prearranged, culturally imposed schedule. Instead of going along with the

return-to-business-as-usual attitude, Jesus answered the most important call of all - to be about his Father's business.

What would it mean if we were to act in a similar fashion? What would it mean to live, not according to human expectations or cultural patterns, but according to what God required of us? What does it mean to be about God's business, rather than other people's business, or even other people's definition of God's business?

Jesus discovered at an early age that answering God's expectations can get you in trouble even with your own family. In fact, focusing on God's business may put an unexpected crimp in the family business. "Business-as-usual" may not be the way God does business. And the world and the church find that unnerving.

The ultimate New Year's resolution does not challenge us to cut fat grams or quit smoking or get to an aerobics class twice a week. **The ultimate resolution a Christian can make is to live in the light of divine intentions, not human inventions.** The New Year's resolution to end all resolutions is to live under the umbrella of God's expectations and to make it your business to be a part of God's business.

But this just begs a bigger question: What is God's business?

God's business is transformation. Think of it this way: an electrical transformer takes high voltage and transforms it into energy that we can use in our everyday lives. Without a transformer, there could be no light in the darkness, no safety in the storm. At Bethlehem, God came to us and gave us Jesus the Christ, who transforms in his life the love and power of God into the impulses of grace and salvation that the world desperately needs.

So what does the Christian who resolves to be a part of God's transforming work on December 31 do on Tuesday January 1? There are two essential requirements: **First, go deeply into the Word. Second, go widely into the world.**

1. The Word. When the young Jesus felt called to live beyond business-as-usual and answered the call of God's business, he first went to the temple. In other words, he steeped himself in the meanings and messages of God's Word. Knowing what God intends for men and women, learning what God has already said and done and promised for this world, is a necessary first step in the transformative process.

2. The World. Being about God's business doesn't mean we do nothing but sit in the temple all day long and discuss theology. Remember that while Jesus started out in the temple, he soon obediently followed Joseph and Mary back out into the world.

We cannot be a part of transforming the world unless we stand in its midst. That's the trouble with our traditional New Year's resolutions - they never step outside the confines of our own self-centered existence.

What if instead of resolving to lose 10 pounds this year, people resolved to eat according to a diet that could sustain the whole world?

What if instead of resolving to get more exercise this year, people resolved to exercise spiritual muscles and join a prayer group in their church?

What if instead of resolving to spend less time in front of the TV and more time reading some good books, people resolved to teach those struggling with illiteracy to read good books to others?

What if instead of resolving to spend more "quality time" with their family, people resolved to take the whole family on a mission project for a week, or a month or even longer?

Our life, our commitment to the ultimate resolution, can help the love of God through Christ transform the world. Tuesday is January 1. A fresh New Year lies unblemished before us. What do you resolve to be on January 2 and for the rest of your life?