A.M.D.G. Sunday After Epiphany – C Texts: Isaiah 43: 1-5

January 10th , 2016 Luke 3: 15–22

***Isaiah 43: 1-5*** But now thus says the Lord, the One who created you, O Jacob, the One who formed you, O Israel: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.  When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.  For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour. And you are precious in my sight, and honoured, and

I love you.”

***Luke 3: 15-22*** As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, John answered all of them by saying, ‘I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing-fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing-floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.’ Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.’

**Stepping Into A New Year**

How many of you made New Year’s resolutions this year?

Some of you may remember the movie ‘Bridget Jones’ Diary’ starring Renee Zellweger, which came out in 2001 *A*t the beginning of a New Year, the main character – 32 year-old Bridget - decides it's time to take control of her life. She is determined to improve herself while she looks for love in a year in which she keeps a personal diary. She starts with her own version of New Year’s resolutions:

Stop smoking  
Stop drinking  
Find inner poise  
Go to the Gym three times a week  
Don’t flirt with the boss  
Reduce thighs  
Learn to love thighs  
Forget about thighs  
Stop making lists

One reason why we find Bridget Jones’s resolutions funny is because – if we’re honest with ourselves - they resonate with many of our own desires. Don’t we all want to live healthier, less stressful lives - stop doing those things that we do, but do not want to do - find more inner poise?

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We may not be so obsessed by our thighs as Bridget but there is no doubt something else about our character which we earnestly desire to change. We don’t generally express these desires – particularly not in public – and only reluctantly to people we trust - because they are, in part, an acknowledgement of what we see as our personal imperfections - what we feel ashamed about in ourselves.  And the thing that sometimes makes New Year resolutions a touchy and difficult subject is that we all know they are extremely difficult to keep. For that very reason, some people have given up making New Year’s resolutions at all. Maybe you’re in that group as well.

However, as many times as I’ve made – and broken them – I believe resolutions have their place. I think it is good to stand at the threshold of a new year – to reflect on what has been and to dream of what is possible. Making resolutions stems from a deep-seated desire that things might be different – that ***we*** might be different. For Christians, that means re-committing to living in the way of Christ – to trying to live more intentionally and purposefully into the our fullest God-given potential. And it means continuing to hope and pray and work toward making our world a place of God’s shalom – justice, peace and wholeness for all creation.

I recently came across a reading, entitled **‘I Am The New Year’**:

*I am the New Year. I am an unspoiled page in your book of time.*

*I am your next chance at the art of living. I am your opportunity to practice what you have learned about life during the last twelve months.*

*All that you sought and didn’t find is hidden in me, waiting for you to search it but with more determination.*

*All the good that you tried for and didn’t achieve is mine to grant when you have fewer conflicting desires.*

*All that you dreamed but didn’t dare to do, all that you hoped but did not will, all the faith that you claimed but did not have—these slumber lightly, waiting to be awakened by the touch of a strong purpose.*

*I am your opportunity to renew your allegiance to God, who said, “Behold, I make all things new.”*

So yes – I think it is important to step into a new year with resolution and intention.

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What might be some New Year’s resolutions that we might make for our world and for the world’s people?

One of the things I would pray for all of us in this coming year – is to love and to be loved. Too many people live lives of quiet desperation and loneliness. Too many children grow up in our community and in our world – abused, poverty-stricken, traumatized, and neglected. The most basic need we all share is to know that we matter – and that we are loved.

That is why the words of Isaiah this morning are ones that we need to let sink deeply into our souls, that they may sustain us in the coming days: *“Thus says the Lord: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine …… You are precious in my sight, and honoured, and I love you.”* And they are ones that in this time of great unrest and uncertainty, our ***world*** needs to hear as well – particularly the most vulnerable in our global society. “*You are precious in my eyes, and honoured,*

*and I love you.*”

They are the same words which gave Jesus courage and strength as well, as he stood in the Jordan River at the very beginning of his ministry – dripping water from his baptism: *“You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased”* he heard*.* And it was the remembrance of those words that sustained him to the very end.

As we step into this new year – with all it joys and sorrows, challenges and successes – may it be our first and foremost resolution to remember our God-given name – *Beloved.* And to remind others of the same – whenever and however we can.

Amen – so may it be.