

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

"New life resolution"

Scripture: Luke 3:1-22

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Songs/Hymns: Intro: To God be the glory 350 Closing: My hope is built on nothing less 349, Communion: the River, Chorus: Jesus Messiah

Communion

So did you make a New Year's resolution?

Determine to more get exercise,  
and go walking every day.

Decide to be more generous,  
and keep spare change in your coat.

The Pew Research Center tells us that

"historically between one-third and one-half of Americans [make]  
their own New Year's resolutions.

The most common resolutions are fairly predictable:

financial resolutions,  
like saving more money or paying down debt...

eating healthier...

exercising more...  
and losing weight...

According to academic research on the topic,  
fewer than half of resolutions  
are still continuously successful by June.

Other surveys find even lower success rates—  
as low as 6 percent.<sup>i</sup>

If you find that the exercise classes are already filled up  
Just hang on for a couple more weeks,  
And you'll find that there are soon  
plenty of open spots.

We aren't good at keeping our commitments.  
Whether they are promises to ourselves,  
To our families, or to God.

Today we are beginning a winter journey with Jesus  
Through the Gospel of Luke.

Luke is an important book of the Bible.

Together with the Acts of the Apostles,  
 it makes up a two-volume work which [accounts]  
 for over 25% of the New Testament.<sup>ii</sup>

And along with the book of Acts,  
 The Gospel of Luke presents Jesus  
 As the Saviour of all humankind.

In Luke chapter 3 we meet John the Baptist.  
 He is travelling around the Jordan river,  
 Preaching and baptising.

Despite his sharp tongue and strange dress (described elsewhere)  
 People are flocking to him.

This is a time of Messianic expectation.  
 People were looking for a leader  
 Who would break the yoke of the Romans.

Many were wondering if that leader was John.

And so the people were coming out to him in droves.  
 People from the towns and cities  
 Swarmed to the muddy riverside  
 To listen to John and to be baptised by him.

But John doesn't care about his newfound popularity,  
 And he is skeptical of the people's religious interest.

He snarls as them: "You brood of vipers!  
 Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?"<sup>iii</sup>

He tells them plainly, that religious rituals,  
 Have no value unless they are backed with real commitment.

"Produce fruit in keeping with repentance" he urges them.

He goes on to describe the social implications  
 Of a repentance marked by baptism:

"the faithful distribution of possessions,  
 the rejection of corruption [and]  
 a legal system that refuses to use violence  
 for its own preservation."<sup>iv</sup>

But even as John preaches, he seems to be skeptical  
 About the commitment of those who have gathered.

John has been around the block a time or two.  
 He knows that people are fickle.

We are fickle, aren't we.

I remember meeting with a family  
 To talk about baptising their children.

This family was regular in their irregularity at church.  
 Up to that point in time their participation was casual.

And so when I met with them I tried to help them see  
 That baptism was a sign of commitment:  
     God's commitment to us,  
     And their commitment  
         to raise their children in the faith.

I cautioned them against jumping into something  
 They weren't ready for.

But they were determined to go ahead with the baptisms.  
 They affirmed their commitment.  
     And then just like that they stopped coming to church.

They made commitments to their children  
 To the community, and to God.

And they walked away from them.

John doesn't seem very happy  
 To have all these people lining up for baptism.

He seems much more interested  
 in the promises of God's activity  
     than what the people were doing.

He was looking forward to "a fiery purification  
 which would reach to the heart of the [people]",  
 a time of salvation and judgement.<sup>v</sup>

But that future has come, it seems,  
 Even though it makes its entrance rather quietly.

Among the people waiting to be baptised, stands Jesus.  
 Jesus has joined the line quietly without any fanfare.

He takes his turn stepping into the muddy Jordan.  
 His lips are moving in prayer  
 as John grabs hold of him  
 And dips him into the water.

As he is raised back up  
 And the water is streaming off of him

We are told that "heaven was opened  
 and the Holy Spirit descended on him  
 in bodily form like a dove.

And a voice came from heaven [declaring]:  
 "You are my Son, whom I love;  
 with you I am well pleased."<sup>vi</sup>

Luke doesn't tell us how John or the people reacted.  
 At the start of chapter 4 we are simply told  
 That Jesus left the Jordan full of the Spirit  
 And was led by that Spirit into the wilderness.<sup>vii</sup>

Have you ever wondered why Jesus came to be baptised?  
 Luke says so little about this event.

Elsewhere Matthew records Jesus asking John to baptise him  
 To 'fulfill all righteousness'.

In *The Message*, Peterson has Jesus telling an apprehensive John:  
 "Do it. God's work, putting things right all these centuries,  
 is coming together right now"<sup>viii</sup>

So what is Jesus making right?

I think that like John, Jesus knows us  
 And understands our lack of commitment.  
 Whether or not we come to church  
 We all fail in all our resolutions to ourselves,  
 To our loved ones, and to God.

We hold on to hope,  
 And yet the wiser among us know  
 That every commitment will somehow be broken.

We can't follow the path  
 Even if it is plainly laid out for us.

And so Jesus comes alongside us,  
 To do what we are incapable of doing.

He who knows no sin stands in line with  
 People like us who will fail to live out their commitments.

And he will complete what we leave undone.  
 He will live out that live of active obedience  
 That God has been looking for in each one of us.

Jesus lives the just and righteous life  
 That we said yes to,  
 But could never fulfill.

And in his life, death, and resurrection,  
 Jesus shares this righteousness with us.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Arthur C. Brooks “New Year’s Resolutions That Will Actually Lead to Happiness” December 31, 2020 *The Atlantic*  
[www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2020/12/new-years-resolutions-will-make-you-happier/617439/](http://www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2020/12/new-years-resolutions-will-make-you-happier/617439/)

<sup>ii</sup> “Gospel of Luke” *Wikipedia* [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gospel\\_of\\_Luke](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gospel_of_Luke)

<sup>iii</sup> Luke 3:7 NIV

<sup>iv</sup> Jerusha Matsen Neal “Commentary on Luke 3:1-22” January 10, 2021 [www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/narrative-lectionary/jesus-baptism/commentary-on-luke-31-22-3](http://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/narrative-lectionary/jesus-baptism/commentary-on-luke-31-22-3)

<sup>v</sup> Stephen I. Wright “Luke 3:15-17, 21-22” *The Lectionary Commentary: the Gospels* 316

<sup>vi</sup> Luke 3:21-22 NIV

<sup>vii</sup> Luke 4:1 NIV

<sup>viii</sup> Matthew 3:15 NIV