

2nd Sunday of Christmas (2021)
Pastor Ed Harkey

1 Kings 3:4-15¹
TLC, Keene, NH

BALANCING THE BOOKS

*“And God said to [Solomon], ‘Because you have asked this ...
behold, I now do according to your word.’”*

God of grace, mercy and peace, who has led me to begin my 5th year as Pastor of this congregation, continue to grant me Your wisdom and discernment, that I might lead this people in truth and love; through Jesus Christ my Lord, with whom you and the Holy Spirit live and dwell together, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Blessed Savior, who out of Your own compassion, was led to a ministry of service, so fill me with the same, that as I have freely received of Your grace, mercy, and peace, I might Pastor this people in the same; even as You live and reign with the Father and Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

O Holy Spirit, who came upon the prophets with power, so fill and inspire me with Your Word, that as I serve this people, I might do so in faithfulness, and having received Your grace, mercy and peace, we might go forth together in faith and love; through Jesus Christ my Lord, with whom You live and reign with the Father together, one God now and forever. Amen.

Introduction

You might as well have handed me a blank check. That’s how I felt when I received my first call to ministry. I had earned my degree. I learned what I needed to know, and now, it was a simple matter of putting into practice what I had been taught.

I couldn’t have been more wrong! Where, even after 30+ years in ministry, four of which, by God’s grace, have been with you, I find I’m still learning, still growing – probably more in this past year than ever before. Where, if my calling as a Pastor could be likened unto a check, the final amount hasn’t been entered, much less taken to the bank, as it were, and cashed. Nor has that time arrived for any of us in the life of our service to Him who has called us and set us apart in His name.

Where, here’s what we know ...

¹ Reprise and revision of a sermon proclaimed in 2009.

The best equipment alone will not insure success. The finest scalpel might as well be a chainsaw without a wise surgeon. The best culinary ingredients, a pile of ferrous goo ... without a knowledgeable cook. Not only does one need the right equipment, we also need the wisdom to use it. (Adapted from *Sermon Studies on the Old Testament (SSOT)*, A, 271)

God graciously grants both. An answer to our prayer ... as individuals, as a congregation, as Pastor and people engaged in another year of ministry together.

It is in His Name that the check has been issued. It is by His own hand that it is signed in scarlet red. In faith, we ask the amount, and then, set out to serve Him. Where, most certainly, in His time, it will be cashed ... all to His glory and grace. Amen.

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We can only imagine the awe that befell Solomon, when, at the dawn of adolescence, he ascended the throne of his father David.

“Lord, I don’t even know where to begin ... I am only a child ... I do not know how to go out or come in ... I need you.”

No doubt, we’ve all been there ... entering a new school or field of service, striking out in a new direction in life, with a preferable image of where you want to be. Perhaps it was in the midst of an illness, or great financial crisis, or some other personal or moral upheaval ... even at the dawn of this New Year.

“Lord, I’m desperate. I so need Your guidance and direction. Please, Lord, show me ... walk with me.”

As a Pastor, you don’t know how often I’ve prayed that very thing. When, it’s so easy to want to do our own thing ... to want just to start running in our own way.

Not so with Solomon. Where, long before he embarked on any building project, or folks flocked to him in hopes of hearing his wise words, we find the boy king at the altar of the Lord (1 Chronicles 21:29; 2 Chronicles 1:2-6). Wherein, God favorably receives Solomon’s worship.

And where, God, in essence hands Solomon a “blank check” which he could have asked any amount (*SSOT*, 271) ... where we also, as individuals, as a congregation, or a Pastor and people, at the start of a New Year, are given the same thing.

What would *you* ask? What amount?

Like Solomon, “*we are but children.*” But God’s mercy is great. “*He, who is faithful, will do it ... [bringing] to completion the work He has **already** begun in us.*” Where, at the outset ...

The Check Is Issued ... Signed

⁴[Solomon] went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the great high place. *Solomon used to offer a thousand burnt offerings on that altar.* ***⁵At Gibeon the Lord appeared*** (lit. “let himself be seen) ***to Solomon in a dream, and said, “Ask what I shall give you.”***

People of God, when Jesus calls us to service in His name, it is He who readily equips us with what we need to fulfill His mission.

Where, first things first – as Solomon stands before the Lord, it is God’s “*great and steadfast love*” alone (!) that brought him there. Whereby, it is by that same great mercy of God that we stand here as well. Nothing more! And certainly, nothing less either!

Which may well challenge many New Year’s resolutions most make for themselves. Though, some seem to be embracing “New Year’s resolutions [that take] an *outward* turn” ... at least according to an article by *USA Today* staff writer Nanci Hellmich. (www.usatoday.com/pt/cpt?action=New+Years+resolution) Where the overwhelming sense of folks she interviewed is that this New Year is less about them, and more about those they would serve.

Like Lonnie Haseltine, of Boxford, Mass, who “knows exactly what she’s going to do: one small act of kindness a day for someone else.” For others? It may be to scale back spending, or desire to become better people. But, says Haseltine says, “I have always thought that I could do more.” Perhaps to pray more, says Clare Mack of Barrington, Ill., to show more compassion – especially to those who are rude. She’s going to have a busy year!

⁶And Solomon said, “You have shown great and steadfast love (i.e. “God’s free acts of generosity and salvation, undeserved by the recipients”²) **to your servant David my father,** *because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart toward you.* **And you have kept for him this great and steadfast love and have given him a son to sit on his throne this day.**

As we stand before this same God, our lives are far from perfect. But we don’t stand here on a record of how well we keep resolutions. No, we stand by grace alone ... by an undeserved mercy that has sustained us. Only on the basis of that promise are we assured of this – of a Savior who issues the check, and who willingly signs it.

Where, with that check in hand it is now ready to be ...

The Check Is Drawn Up

⁷And now, O Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of David my father, although I am but a little child (perhaps 12-14, but expressing “attitude more than chronology”³). ***I do not know how to go out or come in*** (i.e. “carry out my duties”). ⁸*And your servant is in the midst of your people whom you have chosen, a great people, too many to be numbered or counted for multitude.*

It is the first of two things written in the memo line of this check, even as our own hands tremble to count the cost.

Not unlike the (sacristy) prayer I pray, most every Sunday ... a prayer that reminds me who I am in this place:

“O, Lord God, You have made me a pastor and teacher in the Church. You see how unfit I am to administer rightly this great and responsible Office; and had I been without Your aid and counsel, I would surely have ruined it all long ago. Therefore, do I invoke You. How gladly do I desire to yield and consecrate my heart and mouth to this ministry ... Use me, dear Lord, as Your instrument, in Your service. Only, do not forsake me, for if I am left to myself, I would certainly bring it all to destruction.”

² Wolfe, *CPR*, 3:3, 37

³ Vogel, *CJ*, 13:3, 255

It's a prayer any of us might pray, as we set out in faith. Yes, just change the circumstance, or the vocation ... but the posture of humility and trust in the Lord applies. Where, it's true ... the hand and heart tremble as we begin to fill in the amount, to count the cost. But then ... the petition of faith:

⁹Give your servant therefore an understanding mind (lit. "a heart that listens"⁴) ***to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern*** ("to hear justice" or "to give a just hearing" to) ***this your great people?***"

Solomon had it right when he would later write:

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and the knowledge of the Holy is understanding" (Proverbs 9:10).

Or our Savior's own Words:

"Seek first [as in only] [God's] kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." (Matthew 6:33)⁵

So what would you ask of your Savior this day? Individually? As a congregation? For us as Pastor & people together? In a sense, "the sky is the limit" ... especially as God has already given us His greatest gift – that of His own Son. Yes, says St. Paul:

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places ... In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace.

Child of God, the check has been issued. Now, by His grace and with His blessing, we count the cost, scripting the amount with the joy, and anticipation of all that God will do through us. Yes, the check has been issued, signed in scarlet red. It's been handed to us, wherein the heart rejoices when we think of all that we might commend back to Him this New Year as a gift.

Until that time, when ...

⁴ "To hear with attention, interest" (BDB, 1.f., 1033)

⁵ See also James 1:5; Psalm 50:15; Matthew 7:7; Luke 11:9f; John 15:7)

The Check Is Cashed

¹⁰It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. ¹¹And God said to him, “Because you have asked this and have not asked for yourself long life or riches or the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, ¹²behold, I now do according to your word.”

Baptized and redeemed of Jesus ...

What kind of choices and decisions will we make in this New Year, and what will be our motivation for doing so? Thanks be to God through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ that “when our choices and decisions seem more like the fruit of our sinful nature than the fruit of the Spirit, God moves us to turn anew to the [crib], cross and empty tomb. [Here] we hear again his promise of pardon and peace and power for living. [Here] we feast at the Holy Meal, where God forgives and strengthens [us, where] ... [Here] we immerse ourselves in his Word. [O] May the great Physician of body and soul continually implant in us a new, clean, and discerning heart.”

(Poppe, *CPR*, 12:3, 35)

So that when the Lord bids “ask whatever it is you would ask of Me,” His people in this place respond, “Your grace, O Lord; nothing but Your grace!”

Conclusion

Where ... there was nothing ever blank about this “check.” It is the Call you issued to me to be your Pastor in the fall of 2016. *[Share a few words]* ... indeed!

Where ...

Invited by Jesus – as individuals, as a congregation, and as Pastor & people together – we come again, to God the Father, seeking His gifts to be His people in 2021.

Where with the check in hand, signed in scarlet ink, it is *even now* being scripted onto the pages of our lives. Whereby in His Name, issued and filled out in service, it will, in His time, be cashed ... for now, and for eternity. *Amen.*

[12/29] As we approach the beginning of a New Year, the readings for the 2nd Sunday after Christmas seek to strike several chords in the life of the people of God. These are not just “throw away” texts, that simply get us through the rest of the season and onto Epiphany, but readings that gracefully flow from the blessed event of Jesus – the Word – becoming flesh and dwelling among us. The Psalm of the day – Psalm 147 – strikes the up the first major chord: the chord of praise!

Psalm 147:1 Praise the LORD! For it is good to sing praises to our God; for it is pleasant, and a song of praise is fitting. ² The LORD builds up Jerusalem; he gathers the outcasts of Israel. ³ He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds. ... ⁷ Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving; make melody to our God on the lyre! ... ¹² Praise the LORD, O Jerusalem! Praise your God, O Zion! ¹³ For he strengthens the bars of your gates; he blesses your children within you. ¹⁴ He makes peace in your borders; he fills you with the finest of the wheat. ¹⁵ He sends out his command to the earth; his word runs swiftly. ... ¹⁹ He declares his word to Jacob, his statutes and rules to Israel. ²⁰ He has not dealt thus with any other nation; they do not know his rules. Praise the LORD!

In this second, of what are often referred to as the “Hallel” or Hallelujah Psalms, the chord of praise is struck for three things: in vv. 1-6, the general works of God, especially towards those who are outcasts, or feel as though they are brokenhearted or humbled; vv. 7-11, praise is struck for the Lord’s mighty works in creation; and finally vv. 12-20, praises are raised for the love that God has for His people, especially in sending forth His Word. One can immediately see the connection, not only to the birth of Christ, but also for the turning of the year ... especially for a year like the one we have had. Where the call to praise is especially poignant in a culture where that praise may have been muted for a time by all that has threatened us in this year past.

In fact, Amy Grant’s song, “Better than a Hallelujah,” came to mind as I reflected on the Psalmist’s words, where so often we think if we can somehow will ourselves into a state of joy, that all would be well. But given that so much of life is lived out in muted praise, what is reassuring is that God hears all of the cries of His people ... which are, sometimes, “better than a hallelujah.”

Here are a few of the lyrics: *“God loves a lullaby/In a mother's tears in the dead of night/ Better than a Hallelujah sometimes ... The tears of shame for what's been done/The silence when the words won't come/Are better than a Hallelujah sometimes ...”*

What sees us through those times of muted praise is once again “who is doing the verbs.” In vv. 1-6, the Lord is clearly directing the course of our lives, as sure as He guided His people back to the Promised Land following their time of exile. Vv. 7-11 then seeks to reassure us by directing us to how our good and gracious God oversees the course of His creation. He is not – as some have viewed Him – some grand watchmaker who creates the watch, winds it up, and then sits back, as the mechanism winds down. No, the Lord’s activity in creation, and in our lives is in real time ... as near as the last snow fall, or meal we just ate.

Leading us, finally, to the last note of the triad ... the Lord’s “swift running word” ... a Word that brings strength and peace ... a Word that scatters all that might threaten us ... His Word that confirms all of the Lord’s promises, and thus evokes in His people a chorus of praise.

Child of God, how blessed we are knowing that whatever the past may have cast our way, our future – no matter what it, too, may bring – is secure. It does not mean that it will all be smooth sailing. But so long as our God reigns, His people will not be undone. O how the people of Israel must have felt, looking back on all that they had endured, but who, now, were once again brought to the mountain of God, seeing that the Lord’s promises were still, all intact. No less we, who turning the page on a year past, once again get to behold God’s love come down in His Son. Wherein, perhaps, today, all you can muster are a few tears. As Amy Grant pens in the chorus to her song: *“We pour out our miseries/God just hears a melody/Beautiful, the mess we are/The honest cries of breaking hearts/Are better than a Hallelujah sometimes.”* Where, all told, songs of praise to our God – on any day, or in any given year – don’t always have to be in major key!

[12/30] Like yesterday's chord of praise, today's tune continues the theme, striking up a song for praise's ultimate cause ... the life of salvation we enjoy in Jesus. Yes, "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,*" Paul says in this Sunday's epistle reading from Ephesians 1:3-14 ... launching the reader into a catalogue of theological themes that hover around and center in this Savior, "*who has blessed us ... with every spiritual blessing*" ... set forth "*before the foundation of the world.*"

We pick up the song in v. 5:

"In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth."

It is a theological textbook in and of itself, capturing and cataloguing some of Scriptures most profound truths, once again reassuring forgiveness for a year past, and assuring God's grace and blessing for the year to come. It, like all of our readings for this 2nd Sunday after Christmas, are perfect for the turning of year. It's almost as if we can hear our Lord asking, "For what do you need My forgiveness? For what do you seek My assurances? Let me, once again, catalogue My blessings for you."

Yes, child of God, for what might you be seeking the Lord's forgiveness and assurance today? Where, the turning of a year does lead many to turn inward, to become reflective. Where, just turning the calendar to a new month, or a page in a journal that reflects a New Year, brings with it some degree of hopefulness, some thought of change ... for the good. It moves us to reflect on the roads we've travelled ... how we've fared on the journey ... what might we do to travel differently on the road that lies before us? You may well already be working on the list!

Where every day is a day to take such a trek inward for the child of God. We call it Confession and Absolution: that *“first, we confess our sins, and second, that we receive absolution, that is, forgiveness of sins,”* says the *Small Catechism*, *“not doubting, but firmly believing that by [God’s word of forgiveness] our sins are forgiven before God in heaven.”*

What sins? *“Before God we should plead guilty of all sins, even those we are not aware of, as we do in the Lord’s Prayer; but before the Pastor we should confess only those sins which we now and feel in our hearts.”*

“Which are these?” the *Catechism* continues. *“Consider your place in life according to the Ten Commandments: Are you a father, mother, son, daughter, husband, wife, or worker? Have you been disobedient, unfaithful, or lazy? Have you been hot-tempered, rude, or quarrelsome? Have you hurt someone by your words or deeds? Have you stolen, been negligent, wasted anything, or done any harm?”* Truth be told, that should keep us busy, wouldn’t you say?

Where ... in one of the longest single sentences in the Greek New Testament, Paul brings us to Jesus, in whom ...

“We have obtained an inheritance ... so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.”

Child of God, regret not your past ... fear not your future. That is the message Paul brings us to. Where there is nothing in the rearview mirror that can eternally separate you from Your Savior, as there is also nothing on the road ahead that can call into question the love that God has for you in Christ. Nothing!

“[For] when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.”

Such is our song for the ages: the song of our salvation in Christ. Where, here’s a challenge ... why not set about to write your own? Pick a favorite tune from the hymnal, and then, pen a stanza or two ... or three. I’d be love to read it ... and/or sing it. A hymn to your life in Christ for 2021! How about this tune ...?

[12/31] Having struck the chord of praise, and its cause – namely the gift of salvation – it seems only right that we continue to work backwards to the cause of that salvation. Which leads us to our Gospel reading for this Sunday, where for whatever the Holy Spirit’s reasoning in leaving us with only a couple of stories from Jesus’ childhood, we come to the story of Jesus at the age of 12 in His Father’s house. Luke 2:41ff:

41 Now [Jesus’] parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. 42 And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom. 43 And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, 44 but supposing him to be in the group they went a day’s journey, but then they began to search for him among their relatives and acquaintances, 45 and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him. 46 After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. 47 And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. 48 And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, “Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress.” 49 And he said to them, “Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?”

They are the first recorded words of Jesus in the New Testament ... and they come in the form of a question – two actually: “*Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?*” They are the first of roughly 300 or so questions that Jesus asked during his life on earth. As Biblical grammarians like to point out, Jesus loved the interrogative mood! Not unlike the questions which were among God’s first words after creation: “*Where are you?*” He asked Adam and Eve. Which immediately gives us a hint why Jesus loved to ask questions. Questions invite discussion. They foster reflection. They call to repentance. They invite a relationship. Questions become an opportunity for something special to take place, where when asked at the right time, they can lead one to come to grips with the deeper truths of God. Where, in today’s text, Jesus honestly wanted His parents to see things in a different way, in this case, leaving His mom simply to “*treasure up all these things in her heart.*”

Which is the interesting thing about questions ... that when asked appropriately and timely, they take on a life of their own. As one author notes, once you ask a question, you really have no control over what happens next, of where the answer may take you. Where, again, Jesus doesn't ask questions simply to hear Himself talk. No, when Jesus asks a question its goal is to lead one to salvation, or to stretch someone towards faith in Him. In Luke's case, it's to strike up the band ... to soundly strike the chords of Jesus, our salvation, and the joy He brings. Where, in answering the all-important question Jesus once asked - "*Who do you say that I am?*" - we come to know Him and the salvation He gives ... leading us to a complete joy in Him.

Child of God, do not cower from asking questions ... even of your Creator and Redeemer. Which means that you will also be led to spend some additional time in your Bible, which - all told, is not a bad place to be in this New Year. [As an aside, I'm joining one of our members in reading the Bible chronologically this year, to follow the timeline of the salvation story - from beginning to the present day.] But whichever way you approach it, I invite you once again to be in God's Word; where as you read, jot down your questions. Then set about to discern the Lord's answer. I'll gladly join you over coffee or a beer for some hearty discussion.

Wherein, questions can also be a great way to approach your friends and neighbors ... or a society, for that matter, that doesn't see God's Word as being of much value. Yes, get better at asking them. Let your questions to others become a bridge to a relationship you may not have with them, or they with Jesus. Where someone once said, for every statement you make, you should be asking two questions. So, be prepared to listen more than you speak. Where, said the speaker at a lecture I once attended, questions come from patience, and a love of God, leading us to a deeper understanding of our own lives, as well the needs of others who have yet to hear the Good News. And that's the goal - the Good News of Jesus, which leads to salvation, which leads to praise. Let's strike up the band!

[1/1] Happy New Year! 2021 is now upon us ... 2020 a distant memory! Not exactly, but there is something liberating and hopeful about ripping that last month off of the desk calendar, or turning the page in one's prayer journal that just ... feels good, wouldn't you say? Like each morning in God's economy of grace – where *“His mercies are new”*... where another year lay on the horizon for us to be begin anew, stepping out in the grace of God.

It's not unlike what Solomon felt, I'm sure, when he was called to assume the throne of his father, David. It is this event that serves as our Old Testament reading for this coming Sunday ... a text, like the others we've considered this week, that strike a chord within the hearts of God's people. Today ... it is a chord of prayer, which flows from the chords of praise, salvation and the coming of our Savior. Wherein, prayer is critical to/for the lives of God's people – in any age, to be sure, but all the more in our own. Where, we are given a superb example of prayer's necessity in Solomon's becoming king. Let's pick it up in 1 Kings 3:4ff ...

“And the king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the great high place. Solomon used to offer a thousand burnt offerings on that altar. ⁵At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night, and God said, ‘Ask what I shall give you.’ ⁶And Solomon said ...”

Martin Luther writes in the *Large Catechism*: “We need to realize that prayer alone is our protecting shield and shelter. We are much too weak to cope by ourselves with the devil, his might, and the forces he has lined up against us. They could easily trample us under foot. Therefore, we must be alert and grasp the weapons with which Christians should be armed in order to withstand the devil. How do you suppose that, except for the intervention of the prayers of a few godly men like a wall of iron, such great things were accomplished as the checking or frustration of our enemies' designs, plots, murders, and sedition by which the devil had intended to crush both us and the Gospel? ... For when any good Christian prays, ‘Dear Father, Thy will be done,’ God in heaven answers, ‘Yes, dear child, it will most certainly be done despite the devil and the whole world.’”

All to remind us, of how critical prayer is in the life of the disciple of Jesus. Wherein, too often we suffer from the “short view” when it comes to our needs. Too often, we are in it for the “short haul” – for what I can get out of it now. “Too often our prayers are self-centered and short-sighted. They evidence our lack of wisdom, obedience, and humility.” [Wolfe, *CPR*, 3:3, 39]

Here, Solomon strikes a powerful chord in prayer, realizing first and foremost his own limitations. [It’s one of my favorite Dirty Harry lines, in fact ... Clint Eastwood, at the end of *Magnum Force*: “A man has got to know his limitations.”] Wherein, all of the “great ones” of the Bible have expressed similar humility. It is this posture with which we, too, approach our God in any given year, but especially as we begin a new one in His name.

Child of God, at the start of this New Year, rejoice to strike up the chord of praise. Fully strum the chord of your salvation. Complete the triad by pounding out the chord of Christ, who comes to us by way of His precious means. But then, quietly – or at times not so silently – pluck the chord of prayer ... often ... daily ... indeed, minute by minute.

Where, three words of caution may be in order: 1) God can’t be manipulated. Just because we pray, doesn’t mean we approach God on our own terms, or good behavior; 2) praying the right things doesn’t mean that we’ll always get the goods. God’s answer to prayer is not always “Yes,” nor does His answer depend on our timetable. Jesus’ own words bear repeating: “*Seek first [as in only] the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well*”; and 3) be ready, you just might get what you prayed for!

Where, all told, Solomon ended up getting what he asked for ... and more. But only because of where his prayer, his life of service – like this New Year – begins ... with the grace of God. May that grace govern all of your steps this coming year, another in which God promises to always hear your prayers, always answer them, and in a way that is always for our good. Happy New Year! Let us pray!

BASIL [4th century Bishop of Caesarea]:

Remember, O Lord, this congregation present and those who are absent with good cause; have mercy upon them, and upon us, according to the multitude of Thy loving-kindness; fill their garners with good things; preserve their marriages in peace and love; take care of their little ones; lead their youth; give strength to the aged; comfort the timid and afraid; bring home the scattered, restore those who have erred; and unite them all in Thy holy catholic and apostolic church. Succor [comfort in mercy] those who are vexed with unclean spirits; go with all traveling by sea or land; protect the widow, shelter the fatherless, deliver those in distress and poverty, or any kind of trouble. Remember all who stand in need of Thy pity; those that love us; those that hate us; those who desire our prayers, unworthy though we be to offer them to Thee. Remember, O Lord, all Thy people, and pour upon them in abundance of Thy goodness, granting all their prayers to salvation. All those whom we have not remembered through ignorance or forgetfulness, or through the multitude of their names, do Thou Thyself call to mind, O God, who knowest the name and age of each even from his mother's womb. For Thou, O Lord art Helper of the helpless, the Home of the homeless, the Saviour of the tempest-tossed, the Harbor of the voyager, and the Physician of the sick. Be Thou all things to all men. For Thou knowest them all, their petitions, their dwellings and their minds.

Amen.

[1/4] *“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me now away from Thy presence; and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation; and uphold me with Thy free Spirit. Amen.”*

A blessed Monday, the 10th day of Christmas, and the 4th day into those New Year’s resolutions. Wherein, yesterday’s OT reading from 1 Kings 3:4-15, as well as the sermon, had a few things to say about that, namely how the Lord has given us a blank check, signed it in scarlet red, leaving it to His baptized and redeemed sons and daughters to ask what we will of Him, and then, to use our gifts accordingly. Of course, this involves far more than a few resolutions, but rather, how we, by grace, continue to live out our calling as His children, not only in 2021, but beyond.

So, 4 days in, how’s that going for you? Did you make any New Year’s resolutions? What are they? Wait! Hold that thought! Where, I read a brief article over the weekend by Darius Foroux, that there is actually a better chance in accomplishing your goals if you *don’t* tell others what they are. Seriously! Believe it or not, someone somewhere has actually studied this – given that on average, 80-90% of folks fail at keeping resolutions. Why?

Here is what the pundits say: First, others don’t really care about *your* resolutions, which sets you up for defeat before you even get out of the gates. If something is important to you, keep it to yourself. After all, who are you doing it for anyway? Them or you? Second, far too much time and energy is wasted in talking instead of actually doing. I think back to my own resolutions or goals I have set in the past ... and there is some truth to this. You *are* more likely to walk the walk, if you skip the talk. Therefore, put all of your energy into doing, not talking. Finally, third, by not telling others, you actually create momentum as you personally anticipate the outcome. Where, all told, you have the most to gain when [not *if*] you succeed, where the hope of gaining the prize creates its own excitement.

Well, what do you think?

Well, I'm not sure, Solomon had all this in mind as he stood before the altar of the Lord, and whether or not he shared what he had prayed with others after he awoke from his dream, but to cast this whole event in his life in light of a personal one-on-one with the Lord seems meet, right and salutary to me. Kind of like when Jesus said that when you pray, there's no need to make a public spectacle of it, but simply go into your own little space and have that heart-to-heart with the Lord. Where, as many of our prayers center on pleasing our Savior, and growing in our faith and service to Him, others don't really need to know about that. Yes, just simply going about our life as disciples, without all the fanfare, seems a better way to go, don't you think?

So how about this? Don't tell me what your resolutions are. After all, as your Pastor, I want you to succeed in them, as well as in your life of service to your Savior. But here's what I'll do. I will commit to pray for you in this New Year, for the Lord to bless and keep you ... as well as whatever resolutions you make. Like Solomon did, after completing the building of the temple, I will especially pray for your faith, as well as the faith of those near and dear to you. I will pray for the Lord to accomplish His holy purposes in you, as He would direct us *all* by His grace and Holy Spirit. And then, when you have reached your goals, or completed what you hoped to accomplish this year ... then you can let me know, and we'll celebrate it together. I'll buy! Where I would encourage you to sing often the opening Offertory, as I also offer up this closing prayer from RC Pastor W. E. Orchard:

Eternal God, You make all things new, and abide forever the same: grant [us] to begin this year in Your faith, and to continue it in Your favor, that, being guided in all [our] doings, and guarded all my days, [we] may spend [our] life in Your service, and finally, by Your grace, attain the glory of everlasting life, through Jesus Christ my Lord. Amen.