

## LIVING THE LIFE

We have begun a new year, but will it be a “new” year or just a continuation of the old? Much has been made of New Year’s resolutions and how often they are broken, however I want to talk about decisions in the New Year. *Decisions imply action; resolutions can just remain words on paper! Decisions carry by their very nature consequences.* When we make decisions, take a chosen path, the decision can result in following a certain career or changing careers, moving from or back to family. *Decisions frequently are life-changing events.*

That is the type of decisions I want to talk about today, going back to an Epistle reading from Christmas Eve. The reading is from Titus the second chapter, verses 11-15. It is found in your pew Bible on page 202. “for the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly, while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. He it is who gave himself for us that He might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds. Declare these things; exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one look down on you.”

Titus, a gentile, was mentored by Paul. The letter written to him is one of encouragement as Titus is in charge of the church in Crete.

Here in this short letter, only three chapters, Titus’ duties in the operation of a church are laid out. The verses I have focused in on are about living in response to God’s grace, which are then followed by demonstrating good works to all, even the government.

We are called as disciples to “be the best we can be”, but we are not left without an instruction manual – the Bible and guidance by the Holy Spirit! God loves us so much he sent His Son for us. Let me personalize John 3:16 – for God so loved you that He gave His only Son, so that you who believes in Him may not perish but may have eternal life. The question then becomes “who am I living my life for”?

Back in Titus the reason for “living the life” is now the grace of God has appeared in the form of His Son whose birth we just celebrated. However, just like resolutions we must do more than just celebrate. For by looking at the calendar the Christmas season ends and the new year begins. To be a “new” year, then we must make a decision to live the life God desires us to, so that we can be that example to others.

Thinking about it we make decisions a number of decisions every day, some almost automatically. In fact, *life is one decision after another* – shopping, whether to go thru that yellow light, and many more, with some being really difficult due to circumstances and possible outcomes. Many times the difficult decisions come at highly emotional times in our lives. Yet, other decisions come easily and most often with pleasant outcomes or affects. So if we have all this experience making decisions, day in and day out, doesn’t that make us “experts” in the field? Most of us are likely to answer that question with a “no”. Why? Because no matter how many times we are called upon to make a decision, no two decisions are ever the same. Then how can we deal with decisions effectively, especially those decisions relating to life itself?

There are answers found in today's reading from Titus. As we have begun this new year there are decisions to be made as God calls upon us to be his visible example and voice to those around us. **Will it be a carryover of last year, or will we decide to do a new thing?**

Before we know it, Lent will be upon us, February 18<sup>th</sup> to be exact. **Will Lent be just another Lent followed by Easter? Or will Lent and Easter be a time when you decide to do something "new" and exciting or new and quiet?** It is up to you and I to make that decision, no one else can make it for us!

Decisions in our lives must be made based on a firm foundation of truth. In Luke 6:49 *"but the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete."* For us there is no other foundation to build from, especially when making decisions. When we put self aside – the old way – and let God lead we can be in for a new, exciting, and interesting as well as rewarding experience!

We are considering a "new" thing this year at Centennial, expansion. What will God do? Where will he lead us? No one really knows! We can certainly guess, but God is the only one that knows for sure! A portion of the verse I read last week from Jeremiah contains a clear promise - *"for I know the plans I have for you declares the Lord"*. Saying you "trust the Lord" and then doing your own thing is the same old, same old way, the new way is turning it over to Him and putting our trust in Him.

A good number of us here today can attest to a time where we were at the end of our rope, feeling helpless to do anything and then we have turned to God and told Him, " here you do your thing Lord!" **Do we always have to be in such desperate circumstances to turn to Him? If we are going to do it, why do we wait so long, because obviously He will be faithful and come through for us one way or the other!** Hear the promises of our faithful God from I Chronicles 28:9 *"if you seek Him He will let you find Him"* and 2 Chronicles 16 *"He strongly supports those whose heart is completely His"* it is His promise if we seek Him and if our heart is in the right place he has our back!

**These promises are there in the Bible in black and white. So how do we go about seeking Him and have a heart in the "right place"?**

One thing to always remember is as verse 11 tells us – *"for the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men"* --that is you and me, today, right now!!! **That is an important stone in our foundation from which we should live and make decisions in daily life. Knowing if and when we slip up, His grace and forgiveness is there, never allowing us to become so discouraged that we cannot find the way back.**

By having this foundation in our lives and way of living we have been called out to be different. In a good way, to demonstrate to the world what a difference God has made in our lives and can make in another's life who has yet to live in the grace, forgiveness and love that we do.

Being different is defined "as not the same, distinct". How then do we live? Again the Bible does not leave us without guidance. Now some people will tell you there is too much "guidance", and no room for "fun". Really, well I will challenge you that God wants you to have a life full joy not just fun. Fun is one of those things that varies in

the eyes of the beholder. “fun” things can burden you with a load you are not meant to carry and has lasting effects. Karl Menninger, the famed psychiatrist, *once said that if he could convince the patients in psychiatric hospitals that their sins were forgiven, 75 percent of them could walk out the next day!*

In Titus, we are told things to avoid and things to embrace. We are to deny ungodliness and worldly desires. *Ungodliness*, is just a term for disobeying God. Worldly desires, there is quite a list in Galatians 5. A number of them are to do with the flesh and immorality. Why are these high on God’s list? He knows the damage that can be inflicted on lives and our spirit

However, there is a positive side that is God’s desire for us to know and live. **We are encouraged to live sensibly, righteously, and godly. Or put more simply live self-controlled or disciplined, be honest and follow God’s ways. Now just like John Wesley’s three simple rules – do good, do no harm and stay in love with God** – on the surface the three responses to grace are not as easy as first thought. That’s why we need God’s grace in the first place! God knows we are going to stumble and fall and that is why we turn to Him during such times and with forgiveness are able to pick up and go forward!

**When we “live the life” we must break the bad habits and build good ones. Most important in our own personal living life is attitude.** It all starts through a first step and that’s attitude. Here is a great example to make the point....

It is a story of 2 men. One, we will call Jim, and the other we will call Ron. Jim went to church one Sunday morning. He listened to the choir sing, and noticed that the choir sang too loud, so he just made a face and shook his head. He saw a teenager talking as the pastor was praying, and he just frowned. He felt sure that the ushers were staring at him as they passed the collection plate. He heard the pastor use incorrect grammar during the sermon. So as the pastor gave an altar call, Jim slipped out the side door, and shook his head and said “what a waste of time ”

Now Ron went to church also...he heard the choir sing how great thou art, and felt chills run down his spine. He was glad that the church was taking up a special mission offering. He especially enjoyed the sermon. It seemed to really speak to him about an area in his life that he had been struggling with. On the way out, he shook the preacher’s hand, and thought "how could anyone not be blessed after this morning’s worship?

Both men went to the same church, the same Sunday morning, and heard the same sermon. They both found what they were looking for. Jim came looking for faults, and he found them. Ron came to worship God , and to praise Him, and learn from His word, and he felt the nearness of God .

**it is all in our attitude, and how we approach God and “living the life”. We should come to church expecting, sense his presence and act on what we have heard not only within the walls of church but in our daily lives to a world that needs something new.**

**If we are “living the life”, it is a way of life where we do not crave the things of the world, live a life of integrity and love God .**

May this year truly be a new year for us all, living the life. Amen.