

In the Clarity of a Holy Light
January 5, 2014
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So at the start of this new year, I decided--- no resolutions.

... Of course, I guess that could kind of be considered a resolution itself...

... but I won't let myself think too long about that one.

And it's not because there isn't a long list of stuff I'd like to do or achieve.

Just like everyone else, I live my life far from perfectly,

and there's always a lot of room for improvement.

I decided to avoid them this time around,

because they tend to kind of drain you of your stamina and courage, don't they?

Of course, this is the exact opposite of what they're supposed to do,

but in this fantasy of ill-founded success,

they tend to lay the breeding grounds for failure,

And just wind up making people feel sort of hopeless, don't they?

I'm sure you guys have heard all of the

endless advertisements from the grocery stores:

Safeway and Whole Foods advertising special low prices on all of the light foods

you'll need to shape up into the *new you*, for the new year.

And the GYM. Forget about it.

The month of January always makes me chuckle, in there.

Not in a *mean* way, but just because it's a funny thing to watch---

---all of these people you never see the rest of the year, packing onto the equipment,
Setting appointments with the personal trainers. The place is *packed!* Can't find a spot!

And, of course, come mid February, all things settle back into a quiet calm.

The old familiar faces being the only ones left to share
all of those vacant treadmills and recumbent bikes.

Up to the middle of February.

Tends to be the shelf life of our New Year's resolutions, right?

And I know too many people who bear down so hard on themselves,
for not seeing 'em through. ...Makes them feel sort of lost. Stuck.

Unable to see themselves into a future they'd like to be theirs.

I've even already lost mine... right at the start, resolving to make no resolutions.

But it doesn't stop us from makin' 'em, huh?

And as far as I know right now---from this semi-young place.

From this limited place--- that's because setting goals for our lives,
living in hope for the future, and experiencing change is just a natural part of being alive.

It's a part of growing. It's a part of moving ahead with the tide of time.

Goals are important. Hope is important.

Both of these things are *crucial* to us, even.

Having a desire to see a new place in our lives, and growing the hope that we'll get there,

Are absolutely necessary to advance from where we were,

into where we will be...wherever we wind up as we go.

But what about this path, under our feet?

What about What we trust to lead us into these places?

See, these New Years resolutions, they tend to be pretty short lived,

because the path we travel to reach these future days,

Is based on something that just doesn't stretch too far! Right?

Holiday cheer? The *date* of the change in the calendar year?

None of this footing lasts past the month of January!

By February, most of us have taken our decorations down,

Most of us have put away the Christmas cards we received.

The gifts that were brand new are now being solidly put to use

or are tucked away in the shadow of a closet, somewhere, right?

Right along with all of this New Year's cheer.

The very thing we were using as justification---as footing---to move from here to there,

Is gone with the season, not to be dusted off again until next December rolls around!

And we're left alone with Life again. Our Life, as it is.

The same Life that's been inside of us and around us,

through all of those more normal moments,

Free from the clutter of wish lists and wrapping paper.

...On what do we base our footing---our faith---as we move along?

.... Through this time of reflection where do we find *peace*

in all of this restlessness, as we move ahead from where we are?

...In the confessions of our last year, where do we find a trustworthy hope for the next?

Let's get into our readings for today.

From Luke:

(Luke 2) 41 Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. 42 And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. 43 When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. 44 Assuming that he was in the group of travelers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. 45 When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search 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 When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety." 49 He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" 50 But they did not understand what he said to them. 51 Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart. 52 And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.

What's in all of that? Why would this reading be chosen for today?

This is one of those missing pieces of Jesus' life, people talk about wanting to read more of, right?

There isn't much in the bible about Jesus' days between his birth and adulthood;

And this is one of the rare chances in the bible we get a glimpse into this growth. This change.

---This *development* of Jesus as he matured and transformed,

from one state to another, along the path God set out for him.

Our minds, our hearts, are asked to focus on *path*, here, right?

And the places we go between where we start, and where we hope to wind up.

The imagery of *the journey* at the start of this passage.

The image of this moving forward and backward and forward again,

As Mary, and Joseph, and Jesus step along the road under their feet.

Then from our reading in Jeremiah:

(Jeremiah 31) 7 For thus says the LORD: Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob, and raise shouts for the chief of the nations; proclaim, give praise, and say, "Save, O LORD, your people, the remnant of Israel." 8 See, I am going to bring them from the land of the north, and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth, among them the blind and the lame, those with child and those in labor, together; a great company, they shall return here. 9 With weeping they shall come, and with consolations I will lead them back, I will let them walk by brooks of water, in a straight path in which they shall not stumble; for I have become a father to Israel, and Ephraim [EE-fray-ihm] is my firstborn. 10 Hear the word of the LORD, O nations, and declare it in the coastlands far away; say, "He who scattered Israel will gather him, and will keep him as a shepherd a flock." 11 For the LORD has ransomed Jacob, and has redeemed him from hands too strong for him. 12 They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion, and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the LORD, over the grain, the wine, and the oil, and over the young of the flock and the herd; their life shall become like a watered garden, and they shall never languish again. 13 Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old shall be merry. I will turn their mourning into joy, I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow. 14 I will give the priests their fill of fatness, and my people shall be satisfied with my bounty, says the LORD.

Here, this image of a gathering of scattered pieces.

A mixture of pain and joy, regret and hope.

All the while God ushering His people along. Caring for them.

Leading them from starvation and drought to cool waters and grain and wine.

God as our shepherd... through all of the rough and smooth moments,

Holding us together. Even when things seem to have fallen apart...

... God bringing us back into a whole, and leading us successfully forward through *all*,
in the light of God's holy love.

And I love both of these passages. Because all of them lead us back to God.

Back to that Life that formed us and is forming us still.

All of them remind us that we don't travel alone—ever.

That there is not a single moment we are by ourselves, untended.

When things are tough and when things are gentle.

Just as in Luke, this passage from Jeremiah brings us back to the house of God.

When we feel lost---wondering where we are---

We are found always with The One who made us.

The One who brings us wherever we might stand.

What's laid out for us in these passages is utter surety of the path we follow,
when we base our steps on the leading light of God, in our lives.

And you see, that's why I didn't want to make any of these resolutions.

I'm at a point in my life when I have a lot of hope.

A lot of ideas about where my life might go.

Just like anyone else---no matter how far along we are on the path,
unless we're already gone, we expect to keep moving ahead.

To wind up somewhere in front of where we are.

We all have these images in our minds of what our lives might be like

In those places ahead of us we can't see.

But in all of these hopes and ideas, that short, non-committal path of holiday planning...

.. it just doesn't measure up to that length of eternity in God's soul,

Which we walk every day we're blessed to be.

And that path lasts far longer than a cold month under the start of a new calendar photo.

It goes from this minute into the next, today into tomorrow, from one life into another,

...from the smallness of now, into the vastness of the infinite....

Because wherever we find ourselves, we are always in *God*,

whose love, and care, and guidance *are* unending and forever.

During these times of the year, we might find ourselves feeling distressed. Or alone.

Of course, it's not the case, though that fact is so easy to forget.

Whether purposely or accidentally, we ignore God a lot.

We even *forget* God's here, with us.

We travel on like we're by ourselves, but this could just never be.

We are in God the way we are in our own mind.

We can ignore certain thoughts.

Push certain ideas away, but we can never leave our mind.

As much as we like to play with words

considering our moments of insanity, we are *always* in it.

It consumes all of who we are and who we will be.

And this is the same with God.

We are naturally a part of the Soul of the Holy One.

And It forms us and shapes us and holds us *in*, through all of the days we're here or there.

In our low moments and our high moments, we are in God.

When we fail and succeed, we do both in God's soul.

Just like in Luke, whether we journey one day forward and three days back,

we are always found in the House of the Lord.

And God shelters our hearts through each moment.

And watches us as we change and grow.

And as long as we keep our eyes on God with each step we take,

Each place in front of us will be illuminated by a holy light,

For us to better see where we are, and take in the glory of the Life all around us,

...whether we're surrounded by tall things that make us feel small,

or small things that make us feel just a little taller.

And I've been thinking, as all of these lists of resolutions have been mounting all around,

...In advertisements and on the equipment at the gym,

and in the quieter places in our minds...

That really the only resolution worth holding in our hearts is our resolve---

---our *everyday* hope and intention---

---to keep our hand wrapped tight in God's. To keep our eyes focused through that light.

And to trust that wherever God takes us...

... whether we weigh twenty pounds more or less.

Whether we're making scraps or piling on the big bucks.

Whether we feel healthy in body, or weak in the legs...

...to trust that wherever God takes us, we're okay. Because we're always with Him.

And through each change. Each set back and advancement.

We are always *exactly* what God made us to be.

So through the changes of the New Year, don't lose hope.

Remember yourself in God. And keep in your heart the truth that

There's a longer path in front of you.

A path that stretches far past any holiday celebration or tradition.

As we shed past regrets and sorrows, let's create some space for grace and hope,

as we take each step from here in the clarity of a Holy Light

that will never leave us, or lead us astray.

...Knowing that in seeing God with us we've found all we could ever hope to gain.

And that going anywhere with God, is best place we can ever hope to be.

Amen.