

# **RESOLVE THESE THINGS**

A Sermon Preached by Cheryl M. Walker

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It's the fourth day of the new year, how many of us have broken some of our resolutions already? Well it's still early. Think back to last year: how many of the resolutions you made did you keep all year? How about the year before that? Are you like so many people who have gotten so tired of not keeping them that you just refuse to make them? It is estimated that only 12% of us will actually achieve our goals for the new year. With such a miserable rate of success it is no wonder that we stop writing down or even acknowledging that we have made resolutions for the new year. Yet whether we are willing to consciously state them, I think most of us look at the new year, and somewhere in our minds we do make resolutions. This is a good time for introspection and coming up with ideas on how we might improve our lives. We know that we are not perfect, and never can be yet we have, within us, a striving to at least be better than we are. The new year comes and with it a clean slate, so we make resolutions.

In a totally unscientific survey of different websites and what people report as their top new year's resolutions, I found that the number one resolution Americans make is — to lose weight. Considering that over sixty percent of the population is considered either overweight or obese it is no wonder that this would be our top resolution. I know it has been on my list almost every year. The other top resolutions are quit smoking, drink less alcohol, get fit, get out of debt, reduce stress, spend more time with family and friends, learn something new, get organized and volunteer to help others. How many of these sound familiar and are on your personal resolution lists? These are good and admirable goals. Who can argue with any of them as things we should do? Now, how many of them have ended up on your list year after year until you've finally just erased them from your list and thrown up your hands and said "if it hasn't happened already I guess it never will? I'm just going to live with that extra ten soon to be twenty and one day thirty extra pounds." Or you've said "I'm too old to change now, what's the point?" or "I'm young enough, I'll get around to it one day, one year."

And maybe some of them you won't ever do and you are old enough that it won't matter that much. I mean if you're ninety five and you're eating all the wrong foods and drinking and smoking, who are we to tell you to quit? If you made it to ninety five I say God bless you, just do whatever you damn well please. I know if I make it to ninety five I'm just gonna run wild in the streets. I'm going to smoke and drink and eat pastrami every day, every day! Of course the problem is that most people who eat the wrong foods and smoke and drink too much don't make it to ninety five. Which is why we have these resolutions to lose weight, get fit, stop smoking and drink less.

If we know, and we do know, that these things are good for us, and each year we promise to do them, why then do we fail so miserably at making them happen? I think it is because we are resolving to do the wrong things. All of those top ten resolutions are the results of our actions. We resolve to get things done, but fail to resolve how we will do them. I think if we were to shift our thinking away from results perhaps our success rate would increase. Instead of resolving to do those ten things I suggest we resolve to live five things, that will help us ultimately achieve our goals. And five is less than ten so it should be easier.

First we let us resolve to be more patient. We live in a society where we want what we want, now! In business we look only towards next quarters earnings. And when they are good we don't think about what will happen next year or five years down the road. We invest everything in the immediate future and demand immediate results. If Merrill Lynch had thought about a five year plan it might not be called Bank of America today. If its shareholders had not demanded immediate increases in stock value it might not have taken as many risks as it did. It's not just business where we exhibit our impatience.

When I look back at the resolutions I didn't keep I realized I failed most often because I was impatient. I wanted to lose that twenty pounds in a week. I wanted to look buff in a month. If I had been more patient I would have lost that twenty pound and by now I would be looking even prettier than I do. Think about some of your resolutions that are in the trash heap and ask yourself if you had been more patient would you have accomplished your goals?

I know that we New Yorkers are a model of impatience sometimes, it may not be our best quality. Our impatience just adds to our stress level in all sorts of ways. When the bus or the train is late, we start pacing and muttering under our breath and our heart rate increases. Our stress level goes through the roof and poof there went our resolution to reduce stress. We are not in control of the MTA, we are not in control of many things in our lives, yet we act as if we are. Which brings me to my second suggested resolution - humility.

At the beginning of the year as we look at our future as a blank canvas awaiting our artistry, it is a good time to exercise humility. It is time remember that we will not and cannot do all things equally well. We each have our gifts and talents and we need to recognize just how talented we are and what limitations we have. Just before I called that 800 number to order that DVD for only 3 easy payment of 19.95 that was guaranteed to give me the body that I always wanted, I should have been a little more humble and realized that the body I dreamed of I probably was never going to have. I can have a body that is fit and healthy but probably never one that is going to win any kind of Olympic events, especially in basketball.

In creating our resolutions we may have in mind the image of the ideal self, the perfect person we hope to be. News flash: we will never become that person - the ideal person who does no wrong, says the right things and lives a perfect life of integrity. Our goals therefore must be tempered by humility, instead of a perfect self, we should strive to be our best self. That we may achieve - to be the best we can be as often as we can. We will not be that person every moment of every day, but we can surely have more moments when we are our best selves than when we are not. And when we are not we need our third resolution: forgiveness.

This resolution may be the hardest of the five, especially when it comes to forgiving ourselves. We are often our own worse critics and may fear that forgiveness leads to indulgence. In forgiving ourselves we do not indulge ourselves, we do not give ourselves permission to fail beforehand. Rather we acknowledge, when we have tried and failed, that we cannot always live up to our own best intentions. We forgive ourselves our own shortcomings and then we move ahead. We get back up on the proverbial horse and try and try again.

Anyone who has ever quit smoking will tell you the difference between finally succeeding and always having it on their resolution list is forgiveness. We forgave ourselves the times when we slipped and we started again and again and again until one day, we didn't slip anymore. This is the way it will be with so many of our resolutions. We will eat that piece of cake when we know we shouldn't. We will work that extra hour, yet again, instead of being home for dinner with our family. We will skip that morning at the gym and sleep in late. All these things we will do and do again, until we learn to forgive ourselves, move on and try again. Only when we can forgive and then move can we finally accomplish what we want to achieve. All it takes to forgive ourselves is the courage to try again.

This is the fourth resolution we should make, have courage. Have the courage to try knowing that we might fail and the courage to try again if we do. One of the results we found in the Strategic Planning Initiative was a desire expressed by so many of you to increase our diversity. I suspect we meant many things by that term, but no matter

which way we use the term it will mean that to succeed we will need to have courage. Courage to reach beyond our current boundaries of say race, class, and theology to welcome those who are different from us. I say we need courage because it will take us out of our comfort zone and it takes courage to step out of the places where we feel secure. Yet for us to make any lasting changes whether they be in our personal lives or in our congregation it takes courage to take those first tentative steps towards a new way of being.

The rewards of courage are great. Think back to a time when you did something that you thought you might be able to do but was just a little beyond your grasp. Remember the feeling of joy you felt when you found that you could reach further than you thought. Maybe it was when you were eight and learning to ride a bicycle without the training wheels. Or maybe it was when you were twenty-eight and were will to risk it all for love and marriage. Or perhaps forty eight when you decided to start a new career. Maybe that day is yet to come; when it does you will know that the courage to not only dream but to pursue your dreams gives you so very much in return. You only need to have enough courage to take those first few steps towards your hope.

Our fifth and final resolution is to become and remain people of deep faith. Before we can change anything in our lives we must have faith that change is possible. Before we can hope our greatest hopes we must have faith in hope itself. We must be as Carter Hayward, the feminist theologian says, be ready “to leap into the abyss not knowing where we will land, but only that we will land.” Our landings may not always be gentle and they may take us to places we might never have imagined, but we must have enough faith to take that leap.

I know that some days it will be hard to keep faith. Everything will seem to go wrong and the future will seem bleak. It is at these times especially that we must hold on to our faith. Have faith that tomorrow will not be as bad as today and if it is then have faith that the day after that will be better than the day before. When we lose faith that things might change we close the door to opportunity because we are too blind to see it opening. When we have faith in our lives we are open to the possibility of seeing the world and our lives in a new and brighter light. So resolve to have faith, and hope will spring from your heart and each new day will be a blessing for which you can be grateful.

So if you've already made your resolution list toss it and make a new one. You might still have goals to get fit and lose weight and all those other good-for-you things, but don't get hung up in resolutions of results. There is a different way and I think a better way. If you resolve these things - patience, humility, forgiveness, courage and above all faith, the rest of your list will be a piece of cake that you can happily eat.

Amen and blessed be, happy New Year.