

The Road Less Traveled – December 30, 2016

It is a practice in which we engage year after year. Maybe it's losing weight. Maybe it's quitting smoking or becoming more organized. Perhaps it's to spend less time at the office and more time with our family. We make them with the best of intentions. And we almost always fail.

The New Year's resolution is a time-honored tradition. The new year, after all, is a time of new beginnings, and what better way to begin anew than by taking stock of our lives and resolving to improve on ourselves? And millions of adults – experts say as many as 70 percent in the United States – began the new year with at least one resolution. Those same experts say, however, that 80 to 85 percent will abandon those resolutions by the end of January.

In some ways it's a sad commentary on our resolve as Americans, isn't it? There are myriad reasons for our tendency to fail at our annual endeavor to improve. First and foremost, change is difficult for most of us. We're used to eating what we like, watching TV instead of going to the gym, and so on. And we don't do those things in an attempt at self-destruction. We do them because they are enjoyable and comfortable. We are largely creatures of habit, and when you combine that with habits that bring us pleasure, well the cost of change can be high.

Experts also say we fail most often because we set goals that are too long term. By nature we are beings who are wired for immediate gratification, short-term successes. So eating healthy for a week or losing five pounds is immeasurably easier for us than saying we are going to change our lifestyle forever or lose 50 pounds.

But I wonder if there is not more to it than that.

I say that because as people of faith, we are all about new beginnings. As the angelic pronouncements of a Savior's birth echoed off of our gathering on Christmas Eve, we celebrated once again the arrival of the Christ child. It was an arrival that heralded a change the likes of which the world had never seen. No longer was God this mysterious presence who could not be touched. Now God was flesh and blood, just like us. God was touchable, *knowable*. And because of that, human beings were free to experience God in a real and tangible way, in the person of Jesus Christ.

And with that experience came the conviction of change. We see it throughout the Gospel stories of Jesus' birth and ministry. We see it throughout the book of Acts. We even see it between the lines of Paul's letters. When people experienced Jesus – whether in the flesh or spiritually years after his death – their lives were changed. They were freed to live their lives in a way that was contrary to their nature, because they were first willing to give their lives to Christ.

They weren't just different. They were better, a walking glimpse of the human being that God envisioned in those first days of creation. They were people who sought to give,

rather than to receive. Who longed to build God's kingdom, rather than build up their own lives. People willing to lose their lives because they were convinced that that's how they would ultimately find themselves in Christ.

Sometimes I think that is our problem with resolutions. They are all about us, not about Christ. We think we should lose weight because we will feel better and look better and have better self-esteem. We think we should be more organized because it would make us more productive and lower our stress level. We think we should work less because it will make for less strife at home.

When maybe what we should be thinking about is Christ. Maybe our eating habits are a concern because it is sinful to abuse the very temple that God created in our bodies. Maybe organization is a problem because we are losing opportunities to witness and minister to others. Maybe we should work less because we are fervently building a house on sand, rather than building a kingdom on the solid rock of Christ.

So here's my challenge for you. This year, make a single resolution. This year I will put Christ first. In my family, in my job, in my own life, I will put Christ first. It sounds a little naïve, I know. But I am convinced that if we really put Christ first, then the transformation that only Christ can bring will begin to touch every aspect of our lives.

If you're like me, then you've tried it the old way for years. Just this once, why not give Jesus a chance?