

Happy New You!**John 1:1-13****January 4, 5, 2020****Beargrass Christian Church****I. INTRODUCTION.****A. Happy New Year!**

1. I trust that most of you have had splendid celebrations.
2. The Christmas Eve services were a highlight for me.
3. The music, communion and closing candlelight are always so moving and inspiring.
4. And I think I discovered something about my sermons.
5. A number of you would be fine if I just showed pictures of our grandboys, the “three wee kings,” and our new puppy?!
6. I also know that for some of you, the past month has been one of the most difficult and demanding you have ever experienced.
7. This pilgrimage between Christmas and the beginning of the New Year is full of highs, lows, countdowns and meltdowns.
8. For many of us, there is a letdown as we leave our vacation days behind and lug our extra bills and pounds into the New Year.

B. One person summed up her feelings poetically.

1. “’Twas the week after Christmas and all through the house, nothing would fit me—not even a blouse.
2. “The cookies I’d nibbled, the goodies I’d tasted—had gone to my waist—but not any were wasted.
3. “So away with the last of the sour cream dip, get rid of the fruit cake, every cracker and chip.
 - a. “I won’t have hot biscuits or corn bread or pie.
 - b. “I’ll munch on a carrot...and quietly cry.
4. “I’m hungry, I’m lonesome, and life is a bore.
 - a. “But isn’t that what January is for?
 - b. “Unable to giggle—no longer a riot...
 - c. “Happy New Year to all! And to all a good diet!”

C. One of my favorite theologians is Erma Bombeck.

1. She shared some memorable resolutions along the way.
2. “I will go to no doctor whose office plants have died.”
3. “I plan to apply for a hardship scholarship to Weight Watchers.”
4. “I will not loan my car to anyone to whom I have given birth.”

D. As we move into the New Year, resolutions are helpful—especially if there are changes we need to make in our lives.

1. One guy called his girlfriend and heard the following recording:
2. “I am not available but thank you for caring enough to call.
3. “I am making some changes in my life; please leave a message.
4. “If I do not return your call—you are one of the changes.”

E. And many of us have grown cynical about making any resolutions.

1. Someone said: “Don’t worry about 2020 New Year’s resolutions!”
2. “You only have to keep them until February.”
3. “Then you can give them up for Lent.”

II. AND YET, ISN’T THIS ODD?

- A. Although the arrival of the New Year may be the biggest party on the planet, there is no formal religious label attached to it.
 - 1. For Christians, the first day of the New Year simply falls somewhere between Christmas Day and Epiphany.
 - 2. But there is something about throwing out last year's calendar...
 - a. There is something about hanging up the new one...
 - b. With all of its bright and shiny blank days...
 - c. That stirs something within us.
 - 3. We suddenly have the urge to improve, to make our lives better, to strengthen our relationships with each other and God.
- B. A professor of religion shared an interesting article.
 - 1. He talked about our New Year's rituals.
 - 2. He admits that they don't fix much.
 - 3. "The world remains as fractured as it was before."
 - 4. "But by conjuring up other worlds of our own imagining, rituals help us to live with the brokenness and with the ambiguities and ambivalences that attend human life."

III. AND THAT BRINGS US TO TODAY'S GOSPEL LESSON.

- A. John finally gets to take his turn to tell the Christmas story.
 - 1. But we have to use our imaginations to get the message.
 - 2. Other Gospel writers, Matthew and Luke, try to strengthen their stories by linking Jesus to their faith history.
 - 1. Matthew goes back to Abraham.
 - 2. Luke goes all the way back to Adam.
 - 3. But then John comes along and beats both of them.
 - a. He goes back to the very beginning.
 - b. He uses a phrase from the first line of our Bibles.
- B. But can you imagine what our Christmas pageants and plays would look like if all we had was the Gospel of John?
 - 1. John says, "In the beginning was the Word."
 - 2. Not the angels, not Mary and Joseph, not the shepherds.
 - 3. Not the wise guys—or the bright star they followed.
 - 4. "In the beginning was the Word."
 - 5. In fact, we can wrap up the Christmas story in one bright and shiny package if we focus on 14 words in verse 14:
 - 6. "And the Word became flesh and lived among us...full of grace and truth."
 - 7. God decides to deliver the Good News in person.
- C. Barbara Brown Taylor comments on John's Gospel.
 - 1. "If all we had was John, this is what we would know of Jesus' birth.
 - 2. "Before his name was Jesus, his name was the Word.
 - 3. "And he was with God from the very beginning of creation...
 - 4. "He was bringing things into being, making things happen, shining light into darkness.
 - 5. "He was God's self, God's soul, God's life-force in the world, invisible and indispensable.
 - 6. "He was the breath inside all living things.
 - 7. "He was the electric spark that charged their hearts.
 - 8. "He was the fire inside the sun, the space between the stars, the axis around which the galaxies spun.

9. "He was God's message to the world—and the message was light! The message was life!"
- D. Now, that doesn't mean that everyone will get the message.
 1. It doesn't mean they'll understand it, even if they hear it.
 2. And that doesn't mean that all of the pain and problems of the world will go away after we reflect upon this passage.
 3. There will still be brokenness and darkness in the world.
 4. There will be war in the Middle East, starvation in Africa, the poor will always be with us.
 5. Some families will still be fractured.
 6. Some relationships will still be ragged.
 7. Bad things will still happen to good people.
- E. Even for those of us who are spiritually tuned in, John's version of the Christmas story is hard to hear and difficult to understand.
 1. His words are a challenge to read—let alone comprehend.
 2. Someone was assigned to read this text in worship and said: "Oh no—not that one—it's one long tongue-twister."
 3. And it is...and it is poetry...and it is mystery.
 4. It is an effort to describe the indescribable.
 5. It is an attempt to wrap words around the Word—Jesus.

IV. BUT WITH SOME IMAGINATION AND RESOLUTION...

- A. Perhaps we can proclaim with John: "Let there be life!"
 1. With some imagination we can proclaim: "Let there be light!"
 2. We can proclaim: "Let there be glory and grace and truth!"
 3. We may not be able to wrap our finite minds and lives around these challenging concepts and spiritual truths...
 4. But we can see it...we can sense it...we can recognize it...
 5. Grace happens...and the glory of God breaks through!
 1. The Light shines in the darkness.
 2. Resolutions are made and kept.
 3. Things change for the better.
 4. Great things happen to good people.
 5. Relationships are restored.
 6. Families experience reconciliation and forgiveness.
 7. Justice and compassion and peace break out.
- B. It happened for one of our new members, who shares this story.
 1. She is currently on a month-long medical mission trip to Viet Nam and Cambodia and asks for our prayers.
 2. She attended her first Al-Anon meeting here in 2011.
 3. She sent me an email after she joined the church.
 4. "I was not able to drive myself nor did I have the physical or emotional strength to walk into the building for that first meeting.
 5. "Then miracles started occurring within me at the church.
 6. "Where once I could not imagine living on my own since fear consumed every breath of my day, God had other plans.
 7. "God used my healed brokenness to provide hope to others.
 8. "And now God sure pulls on the strings of my heart and places me in some of the most obscure corners of the world!

9. "I pray that God continues to safely lead me and guide me to open my arms so that each person sees God inside me...
 - a. "Regardless of my spoken language...
 - b. "Be it through my eyes, a smile, a hug, or simple divine kindness— my passion mixed with contagious laughter!
 - c. "Many miracles have occurred inside me and I am forever gratefully blessed for each person I have encountered.
 - d. "Each has so intricately affected my life—infusing positive energy, courage, strength and love into my heart and soul.
 - e. "God continues to teach me to share the beams of light and love and assist people to become better people—what a great gift!
- C. In the midst of her darkness she was dazzled!
 1. She was able to see the One who is the Light of the world.
 2. She came to know the One who is full of grace and truth.
 3. A translation of those two words is "loyalty and reliability."
 4. The Word—Jesus—is loyal and reliable.
 5. The One who was present in the beginning—is still present.
 6. From his fullness—we continue to receive grace upon grace.
 7. She knows that now—and it has changed her life forever.
- D. As we begin the New Year together as a family of faith, it is my prayer that 2020 will be rich with opportunities to deepen our relationship with God and with each other.
 1. If we have open hearts and the eyes to see they will be there!
 2. The challenge for us will be to "be there" too...to pay attention...
 3. The presence and power of God are with us.
 4. Happy New Year! Happy New You!