



Happy New Year!

Few of us are as confident in our perfection as Calvin. New Year's Day is often filled with a lot of ill-founded optimism about our capacity for change and self-improvement.

I have no desire to shake your confidence or weaken your resolve to be and to do all the things you desire in 2021. But...I have to say that New Year's Day is like a secular tent revival in which sinners come to repent of their wrong doing filled with earnest emotion, but they mostly find that the transformation they experienced was not as complete as the transformation they sought.

After a lot of hard-won experience of failure at self-improvement, I have come to realize that while I am not powerless at making positive changes in my life, I still have a long, long way to go and not a lot of internal strength to get there.

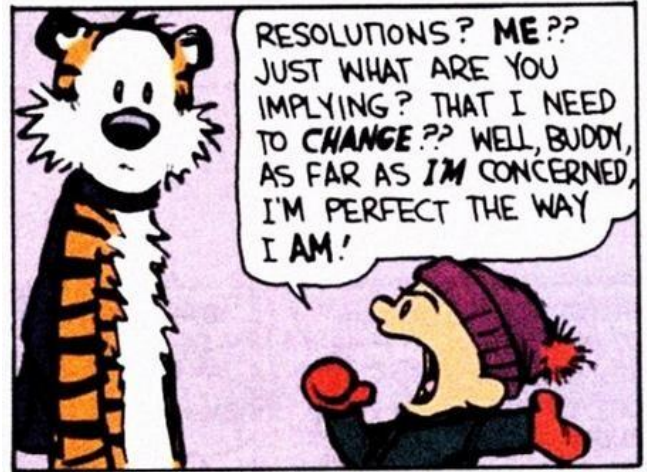
The Gospel (that is, the "good news") is this: God does not wait for us to achieve perfection in order to be acceptable. God doesn't even wait until we have decided to do better. God's searching love is directed at us in our current, very imperfect state (with apologies to Calvin).

God's transforming love will change us as we yield to God's Spirit directing us in our daily lives. But just because we aren't perfect yet, that doesn't mean that God loves us any less now than whenever our hoped-for perfection arrives (if ever).

God loves the possibility that God sees in us. Becoming more like the person that God envisions for me is my goal for the new year. My biggest job in realizing that goal is to stop getting in God's way.

Prayer: *O God our help in ages past and our hope for all our days to come, give us grace in this new year to stop resisting the changes you want to make in us. Amen.*

-Pastor Lynn



Jamie & Adam, Ozzy Butcher, Family & Friends of Gretchen DeMeo, Jane Duewiger, Millie Fischle, Family & Friends of Marge Hutten, Tibby Jankowski, John & Karen Kaitanowski, Jewell McFarland, Nancy McGee, Emily and Sarah Michael, Alyssa Sanchez, Helen & Marvin Wilson

Our love and prayers to the friends & families of the member and friend who passed away in December:

Gretchen DeMeo (mother of Gabriella, Jack & Isabella) passed away suddenly on December 21, 2020.

Majorie Hutten (mother of Sue (Paul) Rich). She went home to be with Jesus, December 20, 2020. Marge was a beloved member of the Activity Group.



I would like to thank the Church Council and the Congregation of St. Matthew's UCC for your generous Christmas gift. This season of gift giving reminds us that we are all recipients of God's great gift of undeserved love. It is this love that has bound us together in mutual affection as a family of faith. It is a privilege to serve with you. Sandy and I are grateful to count you as our extended family and we wish you every blessing in the new year.

– Pastor Lynn and Sandy Morgan

To Church Council and my Church Family of St. Matthew's... Thank you for your Christmas gift which was so generous. I continue to feel it a privilege to serve God in this capacity and journey with you, especially through this challenging year together...yet apart. Blessings for a healthy and hope-filled new year!

- Michelle Kemp



Birthdays:

Clayton Errington (1/4); Donn Mergenhagen (1/4); Bill Asboth (1/8); Kim Hamm (1/14); Jane Duewiger (1/17); Jewell McFarland (1/20); Sharon Mooney (1/20); Gail Burdick (1/21); Barbara Middaugh (1/26)

Anniversary:

Tracy Meyers & Rev. Marna Pritchard (1/22/1985)

The Dawn After the Longest Night

If you're reading this, then you've made it through the longest night of the year.

Big deal.

Beginning today, the days get longer. I can turn the living room lamps on at 4:31 instead of 4:30. We still have a long time to wait until we can enjoy twilight at 9 PM. Don't get me wrong, I'm glad the solstice has come and gone, but it's awfully hard to see much of an improvement. It's still the darkest time of year.

That darkness is not just the result of the tilt of the earth's axis, either.

Even though Christmas is supposed to be about joy-filled celebrations, there is often a real sadness that lies below the surface. We dress up our faces with holiday smiles like decorations on a dead tree and hope no one looks too closely.

Some of us are affected by the leaden skies and the long nights. Some of us feel anxious and depressed by the mandated festiveness. Some are deeply disappointed because the pandemic has cut them off from family and friends. Some are perennially blue at Christmas because they are lonely. Some feel acutely the absence of a romantic partner at a time that emphasizes couples and families.

Many people find their grief for loved ones who have died is particularly strong at Christmas. It doesn't seem to matter if the loss is recent or if there have been many sad Christmases without them before. We feel an ache every time we see the empty place at the table.

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There's no easy way to cure the Christmas blues, but the deep truth of Christmas can help us bear them. Leave aside the parties, the lights, the trees, the Hallmark movies, the cookies and fudge. Leave aside even the angels and the star, the hymns and the homilies. Hold on to this one thing: you are not alone in this. God is with us.

God is with us in grief, in depression and anxiety. God is with us in exuberant excess, in songs that burst forth as well as tears. God is with us when we're so pleased with ourselves that we can't keep from smiling. God is with us when we can barely face ourselves in a mirror.

God is with us in grace. That means that God favors us, that God can't get enough of us. God is always longing for our company. God loves us even when we can't love ourselves.

Whenever you find yourself going through a dark season (and they can come any time of year and at any time of life) remind yourself that God is with you – that there's no place God would rather be than with you.

Prayer: *Dearest Friend, thank you for walking with me through the dark valleys. Squeeze my hand from time to time until I can see a glimmer of dawn. Amen.*

Online Worship Services

Tell friends and family who have computers/smart phones ... Our services are online for all the world to see! On Sunday, the service premieres at 10:00am on [Facebook](#) and our [YouTube](#) channel. They are available for viewing at any time after they premiere.

In-Person Worship Services

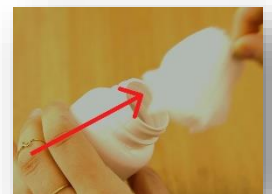
Due to the increased rate of COVID-19 infections in Erie County and in Hamburg and Orchard Park, we have suspended in-person meetings and worship services.

Your faithful, prayerful support has sustained the ministry of St. Matthew's through a very trying year. As the new year dawns, your regular tithes and offerings are needed as much as ever. You can send your donations by mail to the church, attention: Jeff Rich, or by using the online bill paying utilities from your bank, or by giving online using the orange Donate button (below), or find it on St. Matthew's website.



Ludwig van Beethoven often dipped his head in cold water before composing!! Do you think Norm does that??

You should throw away the cotton in your medicine bottles. It can collect moisture, which makes your pills deteriorate faster.



A tiger's skin is striped like it's fur.



In Hershey, PA, they drop a giant kiss to ring in the New Year. In Mechanicsburg, PA (named for all the excellent mechanics who lived and worked there, going back to 1828), they drop a wrench. In Dillsburg, PA, they drop a pickle to celebrate New Year's. (The town is named after the first settler Matthew Dill and the town just embraced the pickle, from fried pickles to pickle soup and they even have a Picklefest in May.)

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Peace, Love and Laughter for the New Year!