



*New Year's Resolutions
Galatians 4:4-7*

December 31st, 2017 ♦ 1st Sunday after Christmas
First Federated Church, Peoria, Illinois
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Thirty-six years ago, on a cold winter morning Pam and Terry Moore bundled the newest addition to their family in a snow suit and wrapped her in a warm blanket. Underneath all of the wrapping their daughter wore a delicate white dress especially set aside for baptism.

At the appropriate time they walked toward the chancel of the church; Mom cradling their daughter and Dad holding the hands of their two older daughters. "Do you wish to have your daughter baptized," the minister asked. "We do," the parents said in near unison.

"Who is your Lord and Savior?"

"Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior?"

"Do you trust Him?"

"I do."

"Do you intend to raise your daughter in the community of faith?"

"We do."

Looking over the heads of the parents to the congregation watching what was going on the minister continued. "Do you, the people of the Church, promise to nurture this child in the faith." "We do," they responded.

"Let us pray," the minister said. "Lord God, by your grace you brought the chaotic waters of Creation to order. By your grace Moses led the people of Israel toward the Promised Land of freedom through the waters of the Sea. In your mercy, Jesus was baptized by John in the waters of the Jordan, thus identifying himself with sinful humanity. May your Spirit bless these waters of the baptism font and may your grace be with this child all of days of her life. Amen."

Then the minister took the little girl from her mother's arms and asked, "What is the name of this child?" "Erin," her father said. The minister cupped his right hand and drew out water, three times - the third time making the sign of the cross on the child's forehead - as he announced to the congregation, "Erin, I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. In life may you live to the Lord and in death may you die to the Lord so that in both life and death you will know that you belong to the Lord."

Over the years Erin had a pretty typical small-town America life.

She went to school,

picked up a musical instrument,

fell in love with volleyball

and played high school ball,

went to college where she fell in love again,

this time to a fella,

got married,

settled into a career

and looked forward to a family.

When a home pregnancy test tested positive

the whole family was ecstatic.

Plans were made,

rooms transformed

and decorated into a nursery.

Doctors appointments were made and kept.

Eventually the day came when their child was born,

a little girl,

a little girl with Down's Syndrome.

If I did not say that this knocked Erin and her husband back on their heels

I would be lying.

Their families—

biological and church—

were about to enter into unexpected territory.

It was shortly after the birth of their daughter,

Ellie, they named her,

that Erin and her husband decided to adopt a Down's Syndrome child,

After all,

they had the assets

and Erin had the professional training

to be the mother of a Down's Syndrome child.

They chose to adopt a child who would be “forgotten”,
a child from an orphanage in South America,
a place where too many children are simply warehoused.

Since that day they have had two more biological children.

All four of their children have their own personalities
as you would expect.

Each, like their parents—
and like you and I,
can at time be stubborn and aggravating,
caring and considerate,
and most of all...loving.

I thought of Erin and her family as I read today’s epistle text.

In the fullness of time, the writer of the letter to the Galatians said,
God sent his Son,
born of a woman,
born under the law,
in order to redeem those who were under the law,
so that we might receive adoption as children. (Text: vss. 4 & 5)

Our text speaks of
Baptism,
Redemption
and Adoption.

Underlying Paul’s letter to the Galatians is the belief
that all religions and philosophies
entail rules of practice,
guidelines
and codes of conduct
that followers are expected to follow.

To Paul
it made little difference
if we're talking about his native Judaism
or some other tradition.

His principle claim, though,
is that we have been adopted as God's children,
not because of some law
but by choice,
God's choice.

Our baptism is a visible sign of that invisible truth.
We no longer belong to ourselves,
if we ever really did,
but to another,
One who Redeemed us,
bought us back from all that we think owns us.

It strikes me that in many of the decisions of her young life Erin,
consciously or unconsciously,
lived out her baptism vows
or promises.
So did her family.

On this last day of the year many of us will make "New Year Resolutions."

We will resolve to
lose a few pounds,
keep better track of our money,
watch less TV and read more books
or do any number of things.

But the best resolution that we can make
is to live into our baptism 365 days of the year.

"How do we do this, though?" you may ask.
Dorothy Sayers once criticized the church for not helping people see
the importance of
COMPETEENCY.

She wrote:

"The church's approach to an intelligent carpenter is usually confined to exhorting him not to be a drunk and disorderly in his leisure hours and to come to church on Sundays.

"What the church should be telling him is this:

that the very first demand that his religion makes upon him is that he should make good tables.
(Dorothy L. Sayers, *Creed or Chaos* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1949, pp56-57 as quoted in
The Monday Connection: A Spirituality of Competence, Affirmation, and Support in the Workplace, William E. Diehl, Harper San Francisco c. 1991, p. 30)

Therefore, I extend a challenge to you:

Resolve

This year I will strive for competence in all areas of my life;

The quality will go in before the name goes on.

Resolve

This year I will do at least ONE thing each day

that demonstrates what it means to live out my baptism.

Now, this one thing is probably NOT going to be a “church’ thing.

After all, God is bigger than a church,

though many of us don’t think that way.

Our baptism calls us to be light bearers,

so bear the light of the Kingdom in at least one conscious act each day.

And when your day draws to a close,

do a spiritual inventory

and dedicate that one thing to the glory of God.