

St Nicholas Church, Prestwick

The Thought for the Week

Sunday 3rd January 2021

A New Year, and we are all earnestly hoping that it will prove to be much happier and healthier than the one that has just passed from us, when we lived with such a roller coaster of emotions, when being separated from our families was horrendously painful, when folk worried about their jobs and their future. With the roll out of the vaccine, we can have confidence that things will get better with the passing months. So hang in there! I am still praying fervently for that glorious day when we can come to Church, without masks, sit in the pew with others, sing the hymns with gusto; and shake hands and embrace at the close of worship!

A New Year brings all the possibilities of something much better.

I wonder if anyone still makes New Year Resolutions? I never hear very many people talk of them if they do!

New Year Resolutions can be a very good idea.

The start of a new year seems like an appropriate time to begin a new venture – some folk resolve to take up a new hobby, explore new possibilities, visit new places or join a Club.

For a lot of others, it is the opportunity to leave behind something that is perhaps negative and detrimental or unhelpful.

Folk often resolved to give up chocolate or fattening foods; others resolve to break an addictive behaviour. A “That was then – this is now” kind of attitude.

The most adventurous people may resolve to do both – to stop one aspect of our life and replace it with something we regard as being more positive, far better.

There is only problem, however.

Very few resolutions last far into the New Year.

January is that month of the year when we resolved to make our lives more meaningful by fulfilling hitherto unfulfilled aspirations.

I will lose 15kgs this year; I will learn to play the cello; I will spend less time on Facebook; I will party less; I will read more – the list goes on and on.

With all sincerity, the dreams and desires are listed out, confident that they will be realised in the months ahead at least, and then I will have a completely new look – a slimmer, confident and intelligent me. Life is good.

Losing weight, we are told, is the most common New Year Resolution. After all the excesses of Christmas and the Festive period, when most folk have overindulged, they are conscious that they have piled on a few more pounds and the trousers are tighter, the jumper isn't as loose as it was.

No wonder gym owners love the first month of the year, as January sees maximum number of enrolments in any year.

Come February, and the lycra dressed crowds thin out a bit, when reality strikes and the enthusiasms wanes.

The more dedicated linger till March.

After that, excuses galore.

If I were to ask you in March how many of you had been successful in keeping to your resolution, I would doubt that I would find many of you who could honestly make that claim.

The number would be even lower by the end of December.

During the year, we are back to our old habits, and it is business as usual.

According to studies, only 8% of people keep their resolutions till the end of the year.

Resolutions are very hard to keep up.

They need discipline and commitment.

Do you recall Bridget Jones and her diary and resolutions for 1996?

“Stop smoking;

Stop drinking;

Find inner poise;

Go to the gym three times a week;

Don't flirt with the boss;

Reduce thighs;

Learn to love thighs;

Forget about thighs;

Stop making lists”

Those resolutions make me laugh every time I read them!

The problem with most of us is that we want everything and that too instantly.

No doubt, enthusiasm ignites the fire within, but over enthusiasm douses the flames fully.

The desire to bring a complete overhaul in our personality instead of just focusing on one or two attributes is a greedy start to the new year.

And when we fail, it usually has an effect on us – we are frustrated with ourselves at our lack of will power and conscious of our limitations.

It is not an encouraging experience, so I want to suggest an alternative.

A slow and steady resolution.

A resolution that will not only make us better people but will make the world a kinder and more loving place.

And this resolution is one which jumped out at me in my devotions recently – it is an injunction that St Paul writes to the Christian community living in the ancient city of Ephesus, when he says to them “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you...and walk in love”.

Kindness, tenderness, forgiveness, love – qualities which are all too lacking in our bitter and spiteful world today.

Everyday I come across a lot of very hard hearted people – folk who have little compassion for the needs of others; folk who are unmoved by the afflictions of the homeless and the pains of folk who are struggling. They go about their daily business, but they never notice the plight of so many other people around them.

Only last week I read the story of a Pennsylvanian legislator, newly elected to the Pennsylvania legislature, who said, “I want to make it as hard as possible for illegal immigrants to live in our state.”

Now, though that is thousands of miles from where we are, there are people who are cruel and thoughtless and callous towards the needs and feelings of their fellow human beings here at home.

Of course, some folk think kindness is weak, not something for those who are go getters to be bothered with.

“Oh, I’m too busy” they say

“Those folk are hapless; they should get up and do something to improve their situation. It’s their own fault.”

Prior to this awful Pandemic which has shaken us all so badly, I was very much aware that our society was becoming less caring, less compassionate, self centred.

Even in the Church itself, Christian folk can often be thoughtless and hard.

During the crisis, I noticed that once more a spirit of kindness broke out in communities the length and breadth of the UK. A spirit that has helped folk cope in a hundred different ways.

A huge factor in the world today is that many people are psychologically confused and wounded and scarred by being neglected and rejected or abused.

Those folk can be full of depression and fear and anger and suspicion

And these folk need so much kindness, bringing them healing.

So, as 2021 marches on, let’s not worry ourselves too much over the size of our thighs or how many chins we have – let us resolve, each one, to be kind and tenderhearted.

Let’s cultivate that, investing our lives into people of all ages, loving them from the heart, sensitive to their needs.

Let’s be proactive and our resolution will indeed go a long way to brightening up our world and the world of those around us.

During the latter months of 2020, often on my Facebook page would appear a post that stated quite simply, “If you can be anything, be kind!”

With that I heartily concur!

The Revd Fraser R Aitken, Locum Minister