



Simple Gifts

Words to Inspire the Spirit

IMMANUEL CHURCH-ON-THE-HILL

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What's to Expect in the New Year?

By The Rev. Rachel Rickenbaker

Anytime a new year begins, it's hard to know exactly what to expect. Many people look forward with anticipation, in hopes that what is ahead must be better than what has been left behind. They look back on the past year, seeing much of what went wrong, and hope that the new year surely will be better than the past. They plan resolutions and make plans for ways to be a better version of themselves in the new year.

The truth is, we never know quite what to expect of a new year. I think, though, that we all have some desire for things to be better. It seems almost an innate part of us that desires for something more, something better.

I wish I could say my new year has started off great, and I'm well on my way to a better version of myself this year. However, the first week of January definitely brought our family up short. A huge snowstorm swept through our area, dumping nearly 14 inches of snow in fewer than 10 hours, and our family was unprepared. When the power went out, we never expected the power outage to last for almost 5 days!

I wish I could say I prayed constantly, turned to God for help, and felt confident that all would be well. But truthfully, I was miserable, and often felt insufficient in what I could do. The whole situation left James and me feeling exhausted, and at times, inadequate.

Looking back on it, we feel incredibly grateful for what we have, but we also saw how vastly dependent we are on technology, electricity, other people, and more. We realized we are not quite the self-sufficient, self-reliant beings our society calls us to be.

When a new year rolls around, the world either says to us: 1) You're not enough, and you need to do all you can to make yourself enough in the new year; or 2) You are perfect the way you are, nothing needs to be changed, and don't let anyone tell you otherwise.

Instead, the profound Christian message is this: You are enough not because of your own resolutions, but because Christ loves you and has made you his own. You are worthy because the King of the world chose to make you worthy, by his life and his cross. You are new, and you have new life, because our Lord rose for you.

That doesn't mean there aren't things to work on. God knows we all have ways that we fall short again and again. And we should seek to work on them. Out of gratitude for what He has given us, we are to love God, to love our neighbor and this Creation God has made, and to love ourselves.

When we love, it is Christ at work in us, shaping us and molding us to who we were created to be. When we sin and fall short, we are called to repent and return to our Lord who welcomes us back with open arms.

It is hard to know what to expect in the new year. We can't always be prepared for every storm (snow or otherwise) that comes our way. Yet, one of my favorite moments in the whole power outage was when our daughter Eleanor brought her children's hymnal over to the couch and asked us to sing hymns with her. "I've got the joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart!" "Jesus loves me this I know." "Amazing grace! how sweet the sound."

We were huddled together, with little light, singing hymns of praise together. And in that moment, I felt grateful for a needed reminder of the seed of faith God has gifted us. That moment gave me just a little strength to keep going.

Even when we don't know what is ahead in a new year, we can be reminded that God is with us, constantly working for good, making all things new, and giving us the strength (even if just a little) to rely on God for what is ahead.

As you think about what's ahead in your new year, I hope you enjoy listening to "[Amazing grace!](#) how sweet the sound."