

**In the beginning**  
**A Sermon by Rev. Frances Savill**  
**Sunday January 2<sup>nd</sup> 2022**

John 1:1-18

How many of you made New Year's resolutions this year?

"A New Year's resolution is something that goes in one year and out the other," quips Oscar Wilde.

That's certainly what it can be and often is, but I think most of us long for it to be something more.

We want New Year to bring substantial change...for the end of 2022 to be different from the end of 2021, we want to be different.

New Year is a moment of looking forward, of imagining things anew, of committing ourselves to a grander vision of life.

But what vision compels us?

What do we want to make anew?

How do we want to be made anew?

And what vision is compelling enough to make it something more than a to do list for then next day or so, but rather something that we can hold on to, or better yet, grabs hold of us and we grow into through the whole of the next year?

This is the season of Epiphany, which means "showing."

Epiphany's are those wonderful moments when the lights come on, and suddenly we see the truth, or we see beauty, or our hearts are enlightened.

As disciples of Jesus, there are those wonderful Epiphany moments when our eyes are opened and we see "it is the Lord," Jesus is in our midst.

So what better season is there to ask God for a vision that will grab hold of us and change us.

Listen to the words of the gospel of John:

*The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. He (Jesus) was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, by the will of God.*

That's a vision I find compelling...

"God willed and gave power to become children of God."

The Apostle Paul describes it as growing up into the fullness of Christ.

That's what I want this year to be about.

At the end of 2022 I want to have taken a step, or steps to grow up into the fullness of Christ, or to look more like my family as a child of God.

I thought for a few minutes what it means to be a child of God...

It means we have a new identity and that can be really good news for some. If there are skeletons in your closet, they don't have to haunt you any more. If your family tree has a few bad apples on it, you don't have to grow up into that branch.

If your father was an alcoholic, or your mother was a manipulative gossip, you don't have to be just like your mother, or just like your father. You have a new identity in Christ, and a heavenly Father to grow up to be like.

As children of God we don't have to wonder if we are loved, or accepted. God seeks us, God forgives us. God's love for us is perfect. There is nothing we can do to make God love us more. There is nothing we can do to make God love us less.

As children of God we are heirs to a wonderful heritage – joint heirs with Christ. Who can imagine the fullness of what that means?

It is God's will, God's power at work in Jesus, that has given us this new identity. It's not something we have earned or achieved, so it's also not something we can lose or be disqualified from.

As God's beloved children there is an adventure set before us to grow up into who we are, to find abundant life in Jesus' name and seize the challenge that is ours as his children.

But how do we do that?

How do we grow in looking like our family in Christ, how do we set a course so that by the end of 2022 we have grown some, and people will more and more see the family resemblance, that we are becoming more Christ-like?

I'm not going to answer that question fully, but I want to give us a good place to start and a couple of things to think about.

The first thing is that we're not going to accomplish it in our own strength. God, through his Holy Spirit at work in us is going to have to do this work.

Have any of you ever put yourself in the hands of a coach or a trainer or doctor?

I want to lose 10 pounds.

I want to strengthen my core muscles.

I want to learn to run a marathon.

I want to be a better hockey player.

To all those things, a wise coach or trainer would take you from where you are and would set a plan for you to follow so that you begin working towards your goal.

Would you expect it all to be easy?

Would you expect some of it to feel like work?

Would you expect you might have to do a few things differently for your goals to be accomplished?

It is not that different to grow in Christ-likeness.

If it is your prayer to become more like Christ, God will honour that prayer.

The Holy Spirit will take you and put you in a life-long training program that will begin to mold you into Christ-likeness.

You don't need any special equipment (except maybe a Bible), you don't need to go someplace in particular or attend a seminar or enroll in a program.

God's training program looks a lot like life.

God uses our lives to be the training ground for growing us into the fullness of Christ.

So for example, a frustrating boss, or a difficult work situation, and God invites us to learn humility, to pray for our enemies, and to learn what the Apostle Paul meant about doing our work for Christ, not our earthly masters.

An illness becomes an opportunity to learn that our value is not because of what we do, but who are in Christ.

A death becomes an opportunity to dwell in our hope that is Christ alone, to know life is a gift to be thankful for, and to appreciate the people around us.

Mundane day after day chores, laundry, dishes, putting one foot in front of the other, are opportunities to learn that all work can be offered to God, and we are humble creatures, under the care of a mighty Creator.

God's training ground is your life.

And through life God is at work, wanting to teach us, willing us to use each day for Christ to be formed in us.

Now it is perfectly possible to go through this life, and not to grow one bit, in fact to grow cynical, hateful, prejudiced, unrighteous, and ungodly, but even that is work.

For day by day God's Spirit is at work in us, urging us, helping us, giving us opportunities to learn, growing Christ within us, taking us from where we are, and little by little transforming us.

One of the best things about ministry is seeing Christ grown in you.

So we begin today, by asking God, by placing ourselves in God's hands, and trusting that God has already been at work, and will continue.

And then I'd encourage you to do the things you know you should do – read your Bible, be disciplined in attending worship, pray, allow God's vision to be renewed daily so that it's not something that you've forgotten about by January 15<sup>th</sup>, or February 20<sup>th</sup>, or even Dec 31<sup>st</sup>.

And at the end of this year we might know that God has been at work in us, Christ has been molded in us, and we truly are growing as children of God.

Thanks be to God!