

**“Did You Hear That?”**

Meditation Preached by The Rev. Jennifer Cameron

January 9, 2022 – St. Columba Presbyterian Church, Belleville

**Scripture Texts: Psalm 29**

- <sup>1</sup> Ascribe to the Lord, O heavenly beings,  
ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.
- <sup>2</sup> Ascribe to the Lord the glory of his name;  
worship the Lord in holy splendor.
- <sup>3</sup> The voice of the Lord is over the waters;  
the God of glory thunders,  
the Lord, over mighty waters.
- <sup>4</sup> The voice of the Lord is powerful;  
the voice of the Lord is full of majesty.
- <sup>5</sup> The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars;  
the Lord breaks the cedars of Lebanon.
- <sup>6</sup> He makes Lebanon skip like a calf,  
and Sirion like a young wild ox.
- <sup>7</sup> The voice of the Lord flashes forth flames of fire.
- <sup>8</sup> The voice of the Lord shakes the wilderness;  
the Lord shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.
- <sup>9</sup> The voice of the Lord causes the oaks to whirl,  
and strips the forest bare;  
and in his temple all say, “Glory!”
- <sup>10</sup> The Lord sits enthroned over the flood;  
the Lord sits enthroned as king forever.
- <sup>11</sup> May the Lord give strength to his people!  
May the Lord bless his people with peace!

**Luke 3:15-22**

<sup>15</sup> As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, <sup>16</sup> John answered all of them by saying, “I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. <sup>17</sup> His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

<sup>18</sup> So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people. <sup>19</sup> But Herod the ruler, who had been rebuked by him because of Herodias, his brother’s wife, and because of all the evil things that Herod had done, <sup>20</sup> added to them all by shutting up John in prison.

<sup>21</sup> Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, <sup>22</sup> and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a

dove. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

### **Meditation**

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Do you make New Year’s resolutions? Some years I do, some years I don’t. Do you keep your resolutions? Some years I do, some years I don’t. Ok, most years I don’t. Maybe it’s because it’s too easy to stay in the familiar routine. This year I made a resolution that I broke before January 2<sup>nd</sup>. I think that may be a personal best. It was about a new exercise routine, so it’s no surprise I broke it. I got a new fitness tracker for Christmas and I can’t even figure out how to set it, so a new exercise routine can wait. Because my health and well-being should all rest on the functioning of a watch, right? Sigh.

A few years ago I made a resolution to start making weekly dinner menus and shopping for the menu in an effort to be more organized during the week and save on grocery bills. That one stuck. I still do it, about 5 years later. It works for me. It certainly comes in handy when something comes up and I don’t have to think about what to make for supper. And it takes a lot of stress out of the busy week.

I receive a daily devotional called “Daily Inspirational.” The one for January 4<sup>th</sup> was written by Wendy Speake, and her biography describes her like this: “With a background in Hollywood as a trained actress, she utilizes the power of drama, poetry, comedy, and spoken word in the study of God’s Word.”<sup>1</sup> Her reflection, *More than a New Year’s Resolution*, is what I read this week...

My Christmas guests have left. My husband and our sons are celebrating the New Year with a camping trip in the desert. I am home, undressing the tree and packaging our nativity set away for the next 11 months. These are my first quiet moments in weeks, with only the familiar sound of tissue paper crinkling as the soundtrack to my thoughts. During the hustle and bustle of guests and going, little space remained for this sort of pondering. But today, here in the quiet, I have a new year on my mind.

I was thinking of sitting down and writing down a few resolutions today. However, I’m afraid that resolution is too small a word for all that’s on my heart. It lacks power, because resolutions are rooted in my resolve to do better. And I often fail at better. No matter how hard I try to read the Bible more consistently and drink more water and say no to sweets and limit the amount of time I spend on Facebook and increase the amount of time I spend on the treadmill... I rarely make it past January 10<sup>th</sup> transformed. *Though I am desperate to be transformed.* No, I don’t need another New Year’s *resolution* that will leave me unchanged. **What I need is a revolution.** That’s the word.

It came to me clearly as the Christmas bell I was carefully wrapping and laying in a box. I don’t need another resolution... and I don’t need more resolve. What I need is more of Jesus. Not a resolution that I make, but a revolution that He makes... in me. Christ in me, revolting

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.wendyspeake.com/about>

against me in this world. His power revolutionizing my weakness. His transforming purpose prevailing over all my plans in the new year. What I need... is a total Jesus-revolution, way down deep in my fibers. Down in my habits too; my eating and my drinking and my shopping and the time I spend on social media. I need Jesus' strength revolting against all of the areas of my life where I've been too weak for far too long!

My weakness stops me from turning resolutions into a reformed life. But the revolution power of Christ reforms and transforms me day-by-day-by-day, for 365 days as I learn to seek Him first.

I'm reminded of 2 Corinthians 12:9: "But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me". That's what I'm doing at the start of [this new year], and I'm inviting you to do the same. **Boast in the One who has the power to completely revolutionize your life this year.**

Do you struggle with sugar addiction and food fixation? Resolving again to eat more veggies and less cookies won't do it! We need a Jesus-revolution in our lives to transform our eating (and drinking too). We need more whole foods, yes. But what we really need is to ingest more of Him and His Word. We need to turn to Him more than we turn into the Starbucks drive-through. We need to run to Jesus, more than we run into our pantries. We need Jesus to crowd out all of the habits and all of our addictions that we've resolved to stop for years and years. Here at the start of [a new year], let's revolt against all of the things we've been running to for comfort, when we could have been (should have been) running to the Comforter. Let's revolt against our tendency to self-medicate with online shopping and run instead to the Great Physician. Do you see what I'm saying? We can make resolutions to stop spending and stop eating and start working out, but we're simply too weak and lack the resolve to make it work. We don't need another resolution, we need a revolution of Christ's power in us as we begin a new year, eagerly anticipating radical transformation!<sup>2</sup>

It's funny, as I packed Christmas decorations away I also listened to the crinkle of the tissue paper. It was a quiet day. One son was at work, one was still in bed, and Bruce and I had been spending a quiet morning together, talking about how nice and calm the holidays had been. The calm continued, and I kept thinking, as I listened to the crinkly tissue paper and styrofoam storage inserts, what made it so different? What made it so calm and quiet? The only difference in terms of people was the absence of my dad who stayed home again this year to avoid the danger of traveling during a pandemic. The cancelation of in-person worship services certainly made an impact on our activities, but I missed leading worship with my dear church family in the sanctuary. What was it? And suddenly it was as if the voice of God rang in my head saying... it was because you focused on Jesus and his story instead of all the other stuff. Not that I'm not focused on the story every year – I have to be, it's at the heart of what I do as a pastor. But that's

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<sup>2</sup> [https://www.crosswalk.com/devotionals/new-year-devotionals/new-year-devotional-january-5.html?utm\\_source=Christianity.com%20Daily%20Inspirations&utm\\_campaign=Christianity.com%20Daily%20Inspirations&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_content=5861026&recip=533397039&aps=5a57bd80fdf7b2e17f57695fb142ad59a9621a165180714a579f377d8b4cbd31](https://www.crosswalk.com/devotionals/new-year-devotionals/new-year-devotional-january-5.html?utm_source=Christianity.com%20Daily%20Inspirations&utm_campaign=Christianity.com%20Daily%20Inspirations&utm_medium=email&utm_content=5861026&recip=533397039&aps=5a57bd80fdf7b2e17f57695fb142ad59a9621a165180714a579f377d8b4cbd31)

not what I mean. As I packed away my multitude of nativity scenes, I realized that the downsizing of decorations before Christmas and the beauty and meaning of the ones I kept not only decluttered our home. It also decluttered my mind. Everywhere I looked there was something reminding me of the story. Gifts from St. Columba's Sessions over the years. Nativity scenes made from a variety of materials. Ornaments received from faithful, Christ-centred church and family members. And it was powerful. Wrapping up the stained glass version of the Holy Family reminded me of the amazing light that shone that night, and still shines no matter what time of year it is. And I felt peaceful even as I worked to carefully wrap and store my treasures. When it was all done, the floor swept and the pictures back up on the walls, I sat with a cup of tea and thought, well, if Christmas can be so peaceful, what needs to happen to make the rest of the year feel that way? Then I read the devotional I've just shared with you and received my answer:

I need to listen to God more and myself less.

When I listen too much to myself, I stress myself out. I worry about things. I drown out God's reason and purpose and get tied up by my own. If I were to just stop and listen, I'd hear a whole lot more than my own limited thoughts.

I'd hear wisdom.

I'd hear assurance.

I'd hear the still small voice of the Spirit.

I'd hear the thunder of God's voice in creation.

The Psalmist paints a vivid picture for us to imagine God's voice:

The voice of the Lord is powerful;

The voice of the Lord is full of majesty;

The voice of the Lord flashes forth flames of fire;

The voice of the Lord shakes the wilderness;

The voice of the Lord causes the oaks to whirl, and strips the forest bare.

That's a voice to be listened to! That's a voice to be heard! It is unmistakable, if we know what to listen for. God speaks in so many ways, and if we would only listen this world would be in better shape. There would be more justice, more peace, more healing, more wholeness. God's voice is over the earth and sky, water and land.

God's voice is also the one that speaks through the form of a gentle dove, identifying Jesus as God's own Son, the One in whom God came into the world, the One who would save the world from its own sinfulness, from sin itself. Did anyone but Jesus hear that voice? It speaks directly to him. The Gospel writer must have heard it or we wouldn't know about it. In Matthew's telling of the story God speaks to the people – *This is my Son* – as though pointing Jesus out to those around him to identify him. There would be no mistaking him after hearing that. When God's voice is heard, the best response is to listen. And the best way to hear that voice is to always be listening for it. It will come through different means.

I won't say God's voice was in the crinkling tissue paper or the squeaking styrofoam, but maybe that's how God got my attention so I could actually hear. As I wondered about the feel of

Christmas this year, did God hear my musings as a prayer? Perhaps. God hears us all the time. Why don't we hear God? Maybe it's because we aren't always listening. Maybe it's because we don't know what to listen for. But keep listening, because God does speak. God will speak. God will speak to you. Be it in the wind and thunder, in a bird's sweet song and the rustling leaves, or even in the silence of a calm moment, God is speaking in the world. Listen, and be blessed by the divine voice.

To close, I'd like to share the prayer with which Wendy Speake concluded her devotion about resolutions. Let us pray.

Dear Lord, More of You is what I need... more of You and less of me muscling through this life of faith another year. I am weak, but You are strong. That's why I don't need more resolve this new year, I simply need more of You. In Jesus's revolutionizing Name, Amen.