

Welcome the Seasons: Epiphany

All Yours

Psalm 37:3-7, 34a

Jeff Marian

Beginnings matter, and how we begin matters even more. And I think that's especially true as we stand on the threshold of a New Year. The days of this New Year unfold before us like a blank scroll, waiting for our future to be written. So here's the question I ask myself at this time every year, and the question I want to ask you today: What are your hopes and dreams for the coming year? Without hopes and dreams we might just wander aimlessly through the days ahead, but when we give voice to our hopes and dreams, they serve as destination points that call us forward.

As followers of Jesus, we don't dream on our own. We invite the Holy Spirit to partner in the process. God has dreams for us, and so we trust the Spirit to shape our hearts and guide our minds so that the destination of our days is bigger than us, as big as God's Kingdom work in the world.

With that in mind, let's read today's scripture from Psalm 37:3-7, 34a (NLT).

³ *Trust in the LORD and do good.*

Then you will live safely in the land and prosper.

⁴ *Take delight in the LORD,*

and he will give you your heart's desires.

⁵ *Commit everything you do to the LORD.*

Trust him, and he will help you.

⁶ *He will make your innocence radiate like the dawn,*

and the justice of your cause will shine like the noonday sun.

⁷ *Be still in the presence of the LORD,*

and wait patiently for him to act.

Don't worry about evil people who prosper

or fret about their wicked schemes.

³⁴ *Put your hope in the LORD.*

Travel steadily along his path.

This is the Word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

As I listen to the words of Psalm 37 at the start of this New Year, I hear the Spirit calling us to not only

give voice to our Spirit-led hopes and dreams, but to commit them all to Lord. And so, that's just what we're going to do today. Today will be a "working sermon" and you're going to do most of the work! As you came in you should have received a sheet of paper along with a pencil. On that piece of paper you'll notice that I've listed five key areas of life that I'm going to invite you to dream about with the Spirit. And then, at the end, we're going to commit our hopes and dream to God as we step into this New Year.

First, what are your hopes and dream regarding your relationships? What relationships would you like to be different by the end of this year, and how would you like them to be different? Is there a friendship you'd like to deepen? A child or grandchild you want to connect with and encourage more? Someone you really want to bless in the coming year? A broken relationship you long to heal and reconcile? Spend just a moment in prayer, inviting the Spirit to speak into your hopes and dreams for your relationships, and then write down what you sense the Spirit saying.

Second, what are your hopes and dreams for your spirituality? In this new year, how do you want to be more like Christ? Is there an attitude that needs to change? A pattern of behavior that you need to stop, or one you need to start? How do you want your worship life, your prayer and devotional life and daily awareness of God's presence to be different? Spend just a moment in prayer, inviting the Spirit to speak into your hopes and dreams for your spirituality, and then write down what you sense the Spirit saying.

Third, what are your hopes and dreams for your body? Far too often the Christian faith has ignored the body, as if it were little more than a necessary evil that needs to eventually be shed to set the spirit free. But central to our faith is the idea of incarnation, the embodiment...literally the enfleshment...of the holy and divine. In Jesus, God took on human flesh. And God does the same in us by placing the Holy Spirit within us. That's why the Bible calls our bodies "temples." If you want to know if God cares about the body, consider just how many bodies Jesus healed. So, what are your hopes and dreams for your body? Are you in need of physical healing? Are there habits that you'd like to start, or habits you'd like to stop, in this coming year? Spend just a moment in prayer, inviting the Spirit to speak into your hopes and dreams for

your body, and then write down what you sense the Spirit saying.

Fourth, what are your hopes and dreams for your mind? What would you like to learn in this New Year? Or, what do you need to learn in order to accomplish whatever God is calling you to? Are you filling your mind with something that isn't really helpful? Are there patterns of thought that you want to change? In Romans 12, Paul invites us to allow God to transform our minds, the way that we think. What transformation of mind are you hoping for in the coming year? Spend just a moment in prayer, inviting the Spirit to speak into your hopes and dreams for your mind, and then write down what you sense the Spirit saying.

Finally, what are your hopes and dreams for your heart, your emotions? What would you like your heart to be filled with in this coming year? More contentment? More peace? More gratitude? And are there things you'd like to rid your heart of? Things like resentment, bitterness, anger or impatience? Proverbs 4:23 says, *"Guard your heart more than anything else, because the source of your life flows from it."* Spend just a moment in prayer, inviting the Spirit to speak into your hopes and dreams for your heart and then write down what you sense the Spirit saying.

What you now hold in your hand is a list of your intentions, your hopes and dreams for the coming year. Because these things matter to you, I assure you that they matter to God. So, as we step into this New Year, let's do what today's Scripture reading called us to do, *"Commit everything you do to the LORD. Trust him, and he will help you."*

Let's pray....