



New Day Church

Need a fresh start?

“IF YOU’RE LISTENING TO THIS...”

*Jeff Peabody
New Day Church
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Okay...how many resolution makers have we got here this morning? Anybody willing to go on record with what yours is? Anybody already break theirs?

There’s something about a New Year that puts you in the mood to take stock of where you’ve been and plan for where you want to go. Even the name of the month January has that idea built into it. It comes from the Roman god Janus, who was pictured as having one face looking backward and one looking forward. He was considered the god of gates and doorways.

That sounds like a pretty pagan origin for making resolutions. But what I think is fascinating is where the name Janus came from. The best that scholars can piece together is that Janus was derived from the Assyrian god Oannes or Uanna, who was said to have come from the sea and who had a fish head and a human head. And Uanna appears to have come from the Hebrew name Yonah, or Jonah, who even further back came to the Assyrians from the sea, with his message urging them to reflect on where they had been and choose a new direction for their future. So there are hints and traces of this idea that come from the Bible itself.

The beginning of the year is not only a time when we set goals individually – it’s a time to take stock of where we are as a church. Where have we come in the past year? Where are we headed in 2010? Not that we can anticipate the future – we certainly didn’t see many of the things coming that happened in 2009. But we do want to be receptive to where God’s Spirit might be leading us as a community.

I am especially aware of that over the holidays, because that’s usually when I like to map out my preaching calendar for the year. So in the weeks and months leading up to the new year, I try to step back and see a bigger picture of what God has been doing and how he might want us to direct our energies in the days ahead.

2009 was a different kind of year for New Day. There was a lot of hardship in it for many people in our church. Every year has its trials, but as we’ve talked about before, this year seemed to be a particularly intense season where members of our congregation were pounded by wave after wave of grief and struggle. From deaths and illness to job losses and broken relationships. Much of our energy as a congregation was spent focusing on how to heal and rebuild and find wholeness.

And that journey isn't over. We have to keep doing the work of processing those experiences in healthy ways. And just walking through those things together has shaped us into the kind of church we are, striving to be authentic and open and real with each other. This body has come together and lived out authenticity in some of the most difficult circumstances. This body has interceded for one another. This body has provided help and support to the hurting in remarkable and practical ways this year. It has been beautiful to watch and I am proud and humbled by what I see going on at New Day. No church is perfect, but you all shined a light in some very dark places this past year.

And there will continue to be a need for that same care and attention to one another in a new year. It isn't as if we can now put 2009 out of our minds and shift gears completely. At the same time, there is new work to be done. There is a reason God has this church here in this time and place. He has situated us precisely to not only help one another heal, but also to impact the world outside these walls.

So this year, the challenge before us is how we take what he has brought us through in 2009 and carry it forward in 2010. What is the natural progression from where we've been? I wouldn't begin to claim I have the definitive answer to that question. But as I looked backward and forward, trying to think and hear and feel what God would say to us, some themes began to emerge. As I talked and prayed with the board and had conversations with others of you, I picked up on common threads that kept resurfacing. And those threads began to knit together into a clearer picture. I want to spend our time this morning casting a vision for what the upcoming year could look like.

Three quotes especially have stood out to me in the last couple months, each one highlighting a different aspect of this vision. If we put all three into a theme slogan for the year, I would call it something like **All In, All Out and All Up**.

All In

Over Thanksgiving weekend, I started doing my background research by watching Terminator 4: Salvation. I could tell it was going to have a lot of insights for me because it had the word salvation in the title!

Ever since I was a kid, I've always been fascinated by stories of a handful of people struggling to survive after some worldwide disaster. Sometimes it's nuclear, sometimes it's environmental, maybe the earth has rebelled – I don't really care. It's the gritty, life on the edge afterwards that speaks to me.

In Terminator 4, the future has been taken over by machines, and mankind is on the brink of extinction. The machines are relentlessly wiping out any humans they find. The situation is dire. But there are pockets of survivors, and they are united by the voice of a leader named John Connor. Connor has access to a working radio transmitter, and he

regularly goes on the air and broadcasts motivational messages to anybody who might be able to pick up the signal.

He has a tagline that he signs off with every time: “This is John Connor. If you’re listening to this...you are the resistance.”

If you’re listening to this, you are the resistance. I heard that and thought, that is a great line. It invested every single person who heard it with a sense of identity and purpose. It said that to hear the message was to join the fight. And it conveyed a sense of how critical it was that everybody participate.

And I would say this morning, if you’re listening to this, you are the resistance. Resisting evil, resisting despair, resisting complacency, resisting fear.

I hope what you walk away with today is that you are vital in carrying out the work of this church in the new year. You are the church. I am the church. We can’t think of it as some group out there that we occasionally visit. We can’t hope that someone else will run with the ball. Each of us has a stake in the life and ministry of this body. If you’re listening to this, you are the resistance.

Paul hammers this idea home in his letters:

Ephesians 4:16

From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

When one of my nieces was a toddler, they discovered she had a growth hormone deficiency. Everything about her was normal and healthy, except her pituitary gland wasn’t doing its job. So she couldn’t grow. Fortunately, it was caught and medical treatments were available to correct the problem, and today she’s reached normal adult height.

But there’s an example of how you can have this small, unseen part of the body that affects everything else. And Paul says that the way the church grows in Christ is as each of us functions the way we were designed. Each person contributes to the health and maturity of the whole church. It would be logical then to say that the growth and health of the church can be hindered or limited by our LACK of functioning. We are integrated in such a way that my choices and actions and your choices and actions aren’t isolated from each other. We might think we’re uninvolved, but our very presence in this group means we’re changing the makeup of the group.

Lest there be any doubt that Paul was throwing the net that wide, take a look at what he told the Corinthian church:

1 Corinthians 12:22, 27

...those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable...Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

Maybe you think, “I don’t know much about God. I can’t see how I matter.” Or maybe you feel you haven’t been a Christian long enough, or you’re not old enough or you’re too old or you’re too sick or you’re too busy. Guess what? None of those change anything in God’s eyes. When you put your faith in Christ, you become part of something bigger than just you. You are the resistance whether you knew it or not. You are called to plant your feet firmly in Christ and stand against the riptide that is rushing past and that would try to sweep you away from your faith.

It’s hard when every day we are surrounded by so much that is going in the opposite direction. That’s one of the hardest pieces about being a Christian: having the courage to live against the grain. That’s why it calls for resistance. I love how The Message version translates Romans 12:2:

Romans 12:2

Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.

The devil doesn’t need to tempt us to become hardened criminals to blunt our effectiveness. He just needs to get us to go along quietly. In his book, *The Screwtape Letters*, C.S. Lewis said,

It does not matter how small the sins are provided that their cumulative effect is to edge the man away from the Light and out into the Nothing.

There is such a constant barrage of messages telling us we don’t matter or our choices don’t matter to God. We get bombarded with temptations that seem far more appealing than a life committed to the cause of Christ. And if we’re not intentional about standing against those, keeping our eyes open and being aware of what is happening, our faith and witness will erode away into nothingness. Jesus once commented to his disciples and said:

Matthew 24:12-13

Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold.

Because of where the world is at, he says, most people will lose their spark for God. Do you see yourself as the resistance? How would having that mentality change your faith and the way you live in the new year? How would it change our church to have a room full of people who have chosen to be all in and chose to live that way?

All Out

Being “all in” has to do with identity, how we see ourselves. When I say “all out” I’m talking more about focus. How much do you invest of yourself in being part of this resistance movement? I have a second quote hitting this issue that actually came from my sister-in-law, Cindy. We got together with her and my brother Jordan on Christmas Day. They were just getting ready to leave, and the conversation turned to spiritual things. Cindy was feeling passionate about sharing her faith, and she said, “There’s no time. Life is short. I want every minute I’m awake to be about mission.”

It was a pretty incredible comment, especially if you knew where she had come from. Cindy grew up never knowing her mom. Her dad abandoned her. She lived out of a car for a while. Married at 16 or 17. Battles with alcohol. A husband who died in jail. Raising 3 kids as a single mom.

But then she came to Christ, and the discovery that there could be so much hope and joy and love was overwhelming to her. Finding a physical family and church family who loved her was a foreign concept. She had no idea life could be like that. Her perspective on the contrast has made her both grateful and compassionate. She has not forgotten how terrible her life was before Jesus, and so she is passionate about sharing him with people who don’t know him. And she wants to be all out.

There is no time to spend NOT being all out. Changing the year on the calendar is another reminder that each one of us is one year closer to the end of our time here on this planet. A new year means we are one year closer to Jesus coming back. Life is too short to waste.

Ephesians 5:15-16

Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.

We waste a lot of time worrying about what other people think. Being all out is living for an audience of one.

We waste time waiting for someone else to make a move to resolve a conflict. Being all out is being first to the plate to confess and forgive.

We waste time waiting and waiting for the perfect opportunity to have important conversations. Being all out is proactively making the opportunity to have those conversations.

We waste time worrying about people’s reactions instead of simply stating the reason for the hope we have in Jesus.

We waste time escaping and occupying our minds with distractions. Being all out means being fully engaged in the relationships and challenges in front of us.

We waste time regretting the past or dreaming of an imaginary future. Being all out means seeing where God is at work right in the present moment.

We waste time going through our routines as if they don't matter to God. Being all out sees everything as a potential piece of our core mission and transforms ordinary tasks into purposeful actions.

I don't want to play church. There's no time for dabbling or just dipping our toes in the water. Let's throw off everything that would tangle us up this year and give all we've got to this race. How much of who I am will I commit to the cause of Christ? It's too important and too urgent to be anything less than all out.

All Up

We need to be all in. We need to be all out. And lastly, we need to be all up. What do I mean by that? As I was preparing the slide show for the Christmas Eve service, I was thinking about a verse in Isaiah that has become my third quote for the morning:

Isaiah 60:1

Arise, shine, for your light has come.

That's a great prophecy verse that was fulfilled when Jesus was born. The light had broken through the darkness. He even helped people recognize the connection by saying, "I am the light of the world."

Arise, shine, for your light has come. I've known that verse in Isaiah for years, but this Christmas, it struck me differently. Those two words "Arise, shine," took on new meaning. First let's look at arise. It's a command to get up on your feet. It is having the power and ability to stand and be counted.

It reminds me of the story when Peter and John were going to the temple and they saw a man whose legs were crippled, begging for money outside the gate. Without digressing too much, here's what happened:

Acts 3:6-10

Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. When all the people saw him walking and praising God, they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

For this man, being able to arise was the proof that God had done a work in his life. If he had been healed in that encounter with Peter, but just stayed sitting down on his mat,

nobody else in the Temple would have had a clue that anything had changed. Getting up on his feet was a powerful way of testifying to the power of God.

And as I think about Isaiah calling us to arise, I hear it as a call to live in a way that demonstrates what God has done for us. If we talk about ourselves as being the resistance, one of the main things to resist will be the urge to just stay seated where we are when God is calling us to get up and let people know what he's done.

Hang on to that thought for a minute, because I want to come back to it after thinking about that next word, "shine." If Isaiah says the light has come, shouldn't it be the light that's shining? That seems to make more sense. Why was he telling the people to shine and what did that mean?

Lesslie Newbigin was a missionary to India for many years, and he used to like to tell the story about villagers in the rural parts of the country. They would sometimes set off down a path before daybreak. When they were travelling east in the early morning, they could see the sun coming up. People travelling west couldn't, but they would still know the sun was rising. Why? Because they could see the glow on the faces of the villagers going east. And Newbigin writes this:

The light cast by the first rays of the morning sun shining on the face of a company of travelers will be evidence that a new day is coming. The travelers are not the source of that witness but only the location of it. To see for oneself that it is true, that a new day is really coming, one must turn around, face the opposite way, be converted. And then one's own face will share the same brightness and become part of the evidence.

The shining we do is a reflecting kind of shine. When I worked in advertising and would go to a photo shoot, the photographers would bring two things with them: First they had these bright, intense lights that they would set up. Sometimes they would take so much power that we would have to run them to different circuits so they wouldn't blow a fuse. But in addition to the lights, the photographers would also bring these inexpensive pieces of white foam board or some other material. They were lightweight and incredibly low tech. But their purpose was to bounce light coming from the real light source in a different angle, to reflect the light that hit them in a way that would fill in the picture from below.

The foam board didn't have to be anything special – you just have to find something that's bright white that you can angle and get in the right spot to both catch light and direct it where you want it.

We're like those white boards, bouncing the light of Christ. The challenge I've been throwing down this morning about being all in and being all out may feel like pressure. You may feel like you have to dig down and generate something on your own to make that happen. But that's not it at all. The power doesn't come from us. We're just reflective material. Our job is not to create light – our job is to stay clean white and be in the right spot where we are both taking in Jesus and bouncing him back to the world.

As you think about starting a new year, what do you see in your own life that is making it more difficult for you to reflect Christ? Is something less than pure in your motives or actions? Are you putting yourself in a good spot to receive the light of Christ so you CAN shine?

2 Corinthians 3:18

All of us! Nothing between us and God, our faces shining with the brightness of his face. And so we are transfigured much like the Messiah, our lives gradually becoming brighter and more beautiful as God enters our lives and we become like him.

That's what being all up means – our faces up, looking toward God so that we can reflect him. Standing up -- arising and shining to demonstrate that what God has been doing in us is real. Isaiah said this:

Isaiah 9:2

*The people walking in darkness
have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of the shadow of death
a light has dawned.*

Here's what excites me about 2010: Going into it as people who sat in darkness in 2009 and felt God's light. Going in as people who have walked in the land of the shadow of death and who found the Lord of life walking with them.

God has a great work for us to do, a unique mission for this church in this community that flows directly out of all the hardships he has brought us through. Why? Because the light has come. There will still be dark moments. There will still be brokenness. But there is also great hope, and we are called to rise and shine with it so the whole world knows. And like the people in the Temple, they will be filled with wonder and amazement at what God continues to do.

All in, all out, all up. If you're listening to this, you are the resistance.

As we go to communion, I'd like you to take a moment for one of three things: Consider, confess, commit.

For some of you, what I've talked about today feels very bold. Far more bold than you would normally get when it comes to spiritual things. If that's you, I want to just encourage you to consider making this year the year to add a faith component to your resolutions. Decide to have more God conversations around the dinner table. Pray with your spouse for five minutes a day. Read through the Psalms or Proverbs. Before writing off what we talked about today as something that doesn't apply to you, I'd challenge you to at least give it a moment's consideration, and maybe ask why it feels like it isn't you.

Second, maybe there are some things you need to confess. Have you been focused on something else to be your light? Have you been living with sin – an attitude, an action, a habit that is keeping you from reflecting light?

The third C is commit. How do you feel about being all in, all out and all up? If you find you're saying yes, but... I know I'll fail. Yes, but I can't do it on my own. Yes, but I'm afraid of what that might look like, This morning I want you to change that "Yes, but..." to a "Yes, and." Yes and Lord, I know I can't do this without your help. Yes, and when I'm afraid, be my strength. Yes, and when I fail, catch me. Yes and Lord I need to know what this looks like. And he will help you keep your yes a yes. Because nothing is impossible with God when he's the one giving you the power to stand, to resist, to reflect him.

Benediction prayer:

*Christ be with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me,
Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ on my right, Christ on my left,
Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down,
Christ in the heart of everyone who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me,
Christ on my Facebook,
Christ in every text I send,
Christ in my surfing, Christ in my email,
Christ in my phone calls
Christ in my carpool
Christ in my free time, Christ in my classroom,
Christ in the eye that sees me,
Christ in the ear that hears me.*

