

Letting go and being free

It's the start of a new year. How many people have asked you about your new year resolutions? Are you already feeling a failure for breaking one or two of them? It is all so predictable really.

Here's a thing: Jesus doesn't call us to resolve to follow him. Jesus calls us to radically yield to him. Everything. Wholehearted. Holding nothing back. But wait a minute - that doesn't sound very sensible, very balanced. Is it possible to be a radical Anglican follower of Jesus Christ?

Well try this for size. It is a dangerous prayer. An explosive incendiary device of a prayer. It's not for the faint-hearted. It's not for the cautious investor. And interestingly, it was written by an Anglican priest who was eventually hounded out of the established church for being too radical. It is John Wesley's Covenant Prayer.

*I am no longer my own but yours.
Put me to what you will,
rank me with whom you will;
put me to doing,
put me to suffering;
let me be employed for you,
or laid aside for you,
exalted for you,
or brought low for you;
let me be full,
let me be empty,
let me have all things,
let me have nothing:
I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things
to your pleasure and disposal.
And now, glorious and blessed God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
you are mine and I am yours.*

The Methodist Church's Covenant Prayer

At the start of the New Year, Christians in the Methodist tradition hold an annual service - the Covenant Service - at which they celebrate all that God has done and affirm that they again hand over their lives and choices to God. This simple yet profound prayer is at the heart of that service.

It is one of the most challenging prayers that anyone might ever utter. For it is a prayer of joyful surrender. It is a prayer of dedication. It is a prayer of liberty. But it is also costly and most people find it very hard to pray.

Most churches hold the service in the New Year. Our friends at Warley Woods Methodist Church will be holding theirs on January 24th in the morning. It is a key moment in the path of discipleship. What makes it important is that it is a prayer said together, corporately. It is a prayer which also requires some preparation, some reflection.

When John Wesley instigated the prayer and the service as an annual commitment, ministers and people spent a few weeks preparing. They would fast and meditate on scripture together and make themselves open to God's possibilities.

What might God be nudging me to do or stop doing in his service? What might God be preparing me for? Is there a specific calling to a particular ministry within the church community? Is there something God would like me to lay down and let go of because it is another's time to take on that responsibility?

Letting go of a role or responsibility is often harder than taking something on - this is especially the case if you have known a very strong call which has given you incredible purpose and filled your life with real meaning.

On January 31st in the evening we shall have a service where this prayer will be said corporately. Most people find it quite tough to say, and really mean it. But the prayer is so central to the Christian life that other Churches have also adopted it.

In our culture we tend to prize our ability to make decisions and choose our own path in life. It can feel very hard to give that up. But this prayer is about surrendering to God in love and joy. Perhaps you can give up on resolutions and instead go for something more radical: utter surrender in a relationship with God.