"THOUGHTS FOR A NEW YEAR"

INTRODUCTION On the eastern edge of the Mediterranean Sea there is a vast and fertile valley known to history as the Plain of Esdraelon. Located at the crossroads of the ancient world, this plain has often been called the battleground of the ages. The chariots of Egypt rolled across this valley on their way to meet the empires of the north. Armies from Nineveh, Babylon and Damascus have camped in its fields. Green, lush and fertile, I remember crossing the Plain of Esdraelon by bus once in the Spring of 1954 and again in early summer of 1985.

DEVELOPMENT One night about 3,000 years ago, the valley was the scene of preparation for one of its many conflicts. An army under the leadership of a king named Saul set up camp to await battle. That evening by the fireside Saul found himself on the verge of panic. What would tomorrow bring? His thoughts turned back to other days. He was searching for something that would bring him a bit of hope, something that would keep him calm and clearheaded. Suddenly he remembered a wise and trusted counselor who in earlier years had offered him wisdom and friendship. But somewhere along the way Saul had pushed this friend aside and forgotten him. Now the old friend was dead. That night as Saul faced the most crucial hour of his life he yearned for an opportunity to talk to this friend once more. Not far away in a little village called Endor lived an old witch who claimed the power to communicate with the dead. Slipping away in the darkness, Saul made his way to the cave where the old woman lived. "Bring me back Samuel" whispered Saul to the witch. "Let me talk to my friend once again".

REFLECTIONS The story of King Saul standing before the cave of Endor is one of the unforgettable dramas of history. Perhaps the reason is that this story reflects a circumstance common in human experience. Many times we find ourselves confronting uncertain and troubled times. We wonder if there is any way we can hear a word about the future.

Foretelling the future is an inexact science. It is possible, however, to so arrange our lives that we can get at least some insights into what tomorrow will bring. We are, you see, creatures of choice and our choices always bring consequences. There's no avoiding that. Our choices bring consequences. Therefore, thoughtful persons will give serious attention to the consequences their choices bring.

CHOICES THAT RESTRICT AND DIMINISH LIFE There are choices, for instance, that restrict and diminish life. Kierkegaard had a story about a wild duck flying south with other ducks. Suddenly the duck noticed, in a barnyard below him, some corn that a farmer had scattered for his tame ducks. The duck fluttered down and joined the tame ducks in the barnyard. He ate the corn and decided to stay a few days, since the corn was free. He remained day after day. Spring came, and it was time for the wild ducks to fly north. The duck heard his mates calling as they went by overhead. He tried to join them, but he could not fly. He had stayed too long on the ground and had lost his strength.

There's a bit of a lesson in that story for all of us. For instance, an athlete who refuses to practice little by little limits his opportunities. An artist who will not rehearse soon has nothing to rehearse for. A business
person who is interested only in today's business may not be doing business tomorrow. A person who places no value on integrity and trust will be trusted with less and less. People who use their friends have no friends to use after a while. There are those choices that diminish a person's life. You don't need to have a conversation with a witch to discover this. You need only observe the way that life works.

CHOICES THAT ENHANCE LIFE

There is another side to this that should be remembered. There are choices that enhance life and widen its possibilities. And this is an important word for us to hear and to take in on this first Sunday of a new year.

There was a story in one of our paper about a man who had been released from prison years back...five or six years ago. He had been a high school dropout and had no training for any job requiring any skills. The man was determined to start over. He got a job as a laborer and went to school at night. He took college entrance exams and enrolled in a community college. He stayed with it, and now he heads his own business. "I am amazed" he said, "at how many people will help you if they know you are trying. Doors have opened that I never dreamed were there."

SOME CLOSING THOUGHTS

It's a wise person who tests every decision with this question: will this direction enhance my life and widen my opportunities? A positive answer to that kind of question is within the reach of everyone.

Now and then someone will imagine a circumstance to be hopeless. Despite our natural aversion to them, problems are not all bad. Remember that the only people who have no problems are those in the cemetery. Problems, therefore, are an indication of life and opportunity. And every problem contains the seeds of its own solution.

No matter how hemmed in life may appear to be, there is always at least one step that can be taken in the right direction. It may be a small step, but the world is so arranged that if that step is taken another will become evident. Disaster is not necessarily resident in a crisis problem. That crisis can also contain an exciting future crying to be born. Before you know it other doors will begin to appear and with a slight touch they can be opened.

And so, dear friends, at every year's end the knowledge of human strength, realistic hope in future potential, and just plain common sense fuel our optimism and we greet the New Year confidently and unafraid. We still believe that with God's help we can surely handle the problems of our time and that's why, at this time of year, I believe in the future. For futures are made by people, by people who make good choices, and I believe in them.

May God bless you as you face a new year, one that will not be without problems, but may you be blessed with strength, faith and wisdom to make decisions that will enhance your life and broaden your opportunities. And if along your way through 1987 you need someone to talk to, don't be afraid to get down on your knees and in prayer have a talk with God. It can make a difference.
LET US PRAY

We find Thy name upon our lips, O God, for Thou hast placed it in our hearts. However much we twist and turn and run to flee from Thy great love, we sense in the immost parts of our being that we have NO FUTURE save the FUTURE that we know in Thee.

For minds that can think.
For hearts that can feel.
For hands and feet that can do.

We thank Thee, O Lord.

For large purposes that call us.
For associations and causes that unite us.
For grace that restores and forgives.

We thank Thee, O Lord.

O Thou who art able to bring the new to birth, work Thou in our lives and here in our Church and make us agents of our brother's good, knit together in our concern for each other.

Help us to see each other as people.

And let the love of Christ so rule our hearts that each may think of the other first. Make us grateful for each other's presence, open to each other's needs, careful of each other's rights and happy for each other's gains. In the name and spirit of Christ, we pray. Amen
"THOUGHTS FOR A NEW YEAR"

A Meditation By

Rev. Philip A. C. Clarke
"THOUGHTS FOR A NEW YEAR"

TEXT: "But one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus".

(Philippians 4:13)

INTRODUCTION This past week we have been closing the books on another year's work. The changing of the calendar for most of us is a time for taking stock. It's a time for review...for decisions...for resolutions.

In light of the passing of the old year and the coming of a new year, it may well be that you've been doing some evaluating...taking stock of yourself...your situation...your relationships. Where are we going? And what's it all adding up to? What are we here for? What are the real values...the important things in life?

It's good for us to pause occasionally in the midst of the rush of life in a place like New York and to come back to the "home base" in order to renew our perspective and to get our bearings. And what better time to do this on the first Sunday of a New Year and to confirm our insights and feelings at the Altar of our Church. "Today is the first day of the rest of your life".

DEVELOPMENT We're active people, constantly on the go. We huff and puff and sometimes complain that we have too much to do and not enough time to get it all done.

Some of us rush along through life without any real sense of purpose or direction, not knowing where we're going. Gamaliel Bradford of Massachusetts once said of a friend, Edward Fitzgerald:

"Like so many people who have no object in life, he was busy from morning till night"

The same can be said of some of us - rushing through life, busy from morning till night, spending our strengths and exhausting our energies on things that in the long run really aren't that important...with the result that little time is left for those things that are important, those values and concerns that should be carefully woven into the pattern of the rich and abundant life.

Remember that line from Thoreau's "Walden"...where he tells us that he "went to the woods in order to live deliberately". "To live deliberately" - we would do well to reflect on that phrase. Living deliberately means having a plan and a purpose in order to avoid drifting. Benjamin Franklin pointed out to us in his autobiography that early along in his life he concluded that the reason so many people fail is simply because they have no plan, no purpose to their lives. They muddle along through life...hoping for the best...usually ending up with the worst. Clearly established goals...a game plan by which to achieve those goals can help make life more worthwhile. (Text)

DEAR ABBY I often find myself reading "Dear Abby". Her advice is good and I usually appreciate what she has to say. Last Tuesday's column was worth clipping and sharing. Since it ties in with what we're thinking about,
let me read it to you:

DEAR ABBY: Last New Year's Eve you published nine rules for living. You suggested that they would make an excellent set of New Year's resolutions, and that's exactly what I used them for.

I read them every morning and can truthfully say that I am a much better person today than I was a year ago simply because I tried to live by these rules.

In my humble opinion that was the best advice I've ever read. This is to thank you for that column, Abby, and to ask you to please run it again for those who may have missed it. I hope it will do for others what it did for me.

I am not a teen-ager. I am a 33 year old wife and mother, but we are never too old to learn, right?

STILL LEARNING.

DEAR STILL: Right. But don't thank me. I didn't originate those rules. I paraphrased them. It's the credo for Overeaters Anonymous. Their credo:

1. Just for today I will try to live through this day only, and not set far-reaching goals to try to overcome all my problems at once. I know I can do something for 12 hours that would appall me if I felt I had to keep it up for a lifetime.

2. Just for today I will try to be happy. Lincoln said, "Most folks are about as happy as they make up their minds to be". He was right. I will not dwell on thoughts that depress me. I will chase them out of my mind and replace them with happy thoughts.

3. Just for today I will adjust myself to what is. I will try to change those things I can change and accept those things I cannot.

4. Just for today I will try to improve my mind. I will not be a mental loafer. I will force myself to read something that requires effort, thought and concentration.

5. Just for today I will exercise my soul in three ways: I will do a good deed for somebody - without letting them know it. (If they find out I did it, it won't count). I will do at least two things that I know I should do, but have been putting off. I will not show anyone that my feelings are hurt; they may be hurt, but today I will not show it.

6. Just for today I will be agreeable. I will look as well as I can, dress becomingly, talk softly, act courteously, and speak ill of no one. Just for today I'll not try to improve anybody except myself.
7. Just for today I will have a program. I may not follow it exactly, but I will have it, thereby saving myself from two pests: hurry and indecision.

8. Just for today I will have a quiet half hour to relax alone. During this time I will reflect on my behavior and will try to get a better perspective on my life. Carlyle: "speech is of time, silence is of eternity"

9. Just for today I will be unafraid. I will gather the courage to do what is right and take the responsibility for my own actions. I will expect nothing from the world, but I will realize that as I give to the world, the world will give to me.

It makes sense doesn't it? And so does their program. It's free. And PS: Have a happy, healthy New Year.

LOVE, ABBY

ADD ONE MORE There's a good read map for the journey ahead. A good game-plan, if you will. To those nine rules, let me add one more, thus rounding it out to TEN.

Just for today, make a greater effort to include God in your plan. Just for today, make the effort to devote time to a bit of Christian growth - service and study. Just for today, ask Him to lead you and guide you in your decisions. Try to remember that line from the Old Testament - "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength".

LAST SUPPER Last Tuesday evening found many of the clubs and restaurants of the city filled with people eating the last supper of the old year and drinking a toast to the New Year. Christians are reminded of the Last Supper that Jesus had with his disciples. It has come down to us across twenty centuries of time and has become for His followers a Sacrament of Dedication.

In a few moments you will be kneeling at the Altar to receive the Sacrament. Let those moments be for you a time of high resolve, a time of decision, a time of dedication. As you rise and depart, may you carry with you the directive implicit in these closing lines:

"And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year: 'Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown'.

And he replied, 'Go out into the darkness...and put your hand into the hand of God. That shall be to you better than a light and safer than any known way.'"

LET US PRAY
PRAYER  

O God Eternal, whose love is unfailing and who canst make all things new, may these be moments of high resolve for each of us in this sanctuary, this hour.

We praise Thee that our times are controlled by Thee; we praise Thee for thy goodness and mercy which follow us.

We thank Thee for failures and sorrows Thou didst weave into a pattern of good. We thank thee for thy forgiveness for things which we should not have done, and for the opportunity for the fresh start, the new beginning.

We need thy help to carry out the noble purposes which we have envisioned. Grant that we may show forth our thanks by deepening our loyalty and obedience to Thee, in our labors and in our leisure, in our tears and in our laughter, in our worship and in our service to others.

Look with tender mercy upon those who are sick...those who have lost loved ones in recent days...those whom we remember in the privacy of our thoughts at this time.

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ANTHEM: "The Shepherd's Carol"

"Me thinks I see an Heav'nly Host of angels on the wing; me thinks I hear their cheerful notes, so merrily they sing, so merrily they sing. Let all your fears be banished hence, glad tidings I proclaim; for there is a Saviour born today, and Jesus is His name, and Jesus is His name.

Lay down your crooks and quit your flocks, to Bethlehem repaid; and let your wandering steps be squared by yonder shining star, by yonder shining star. Then learn from hence, ye rural swains, the meekness of your God, who left the boundless realms of joy to ransom you with blood, to ransom you with blood.

The Master of the Inn refused a more commodious place, ungenerous soul of savage mould and destitute of grace; and destitute of grace. Exult ye oxen, low for joy, ye tenants of the stall; pay your obeisance on your knees, unanimously fall, unanimously fall. The Royal Guest you entertain is not of common birth, but second is the Great I Am, the God of Heaven and Earth, the God of Heaven and Earth.

Then suddenly a Heav'nly Host around the shepherds throng, exulting in the Three-fold God, and thus addressed their song and thus addressed their song."

ADULT BIBLE CLASS

The Adult Bible Class meets on Sunday mornings at 9:30 on the third floor. New friends are always welcome. Now's a good time to join as the class begins a study of Luke's Acts of the Apostles.

NOW AVAILABLE

The 1984 boxes of weekly offering envelopes are available this morning for distribution. Pick up the copy that has your name on it. They're on a table in the Russell Room.

If you did not make a pledge for 1984 and wish to have a box of offering envelopes for your weekly gifts, mention it to Larry Morales, Chairman of the Financial Canvass.

ORGAN POSTLUDE

The organ postlude - a final offering of our praise to God - is played after the Benediction. Time permitting, we invite you to share in the beauty of it.

FOR THOSE WHO SING

New members are always welcome to audition to sing in the Choir. Rehearsals are held on Wednesdays at 6:15 pm in the downstairs Choir Room. Now's a good time to join the choir as we begin a new year.
PARK AVENUE
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
106 East 86th Street
New York, N.Y. 10028
AT 9-6997

CHURCH DIRECTORY
Rev. Philip A. C. Clarke Minister
Dr. Harold C. Metzner Associate Minister, Emeritus
Mr. Lyndon Woodside Organist-Choir Director
Mrs. Nancy M. Billings Secretary
Mrs. Judith Keisman Day School Director

GENERAL OFFICERS
Lay Member, Annual Conference Mr. Paul R. Russell
Lay Leader, The Church Dr. George Hull
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Chairman, Council on Ministries Mr. William Proctor
Chairman, Education Commission Mrs. James Nespole
Chairman, Finance Commission Mr. Edward Brown
Chairman, Membership Commission Mr. William Blanton
Chairman, Ushers Mr. Bradley Taylor
SECOND SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS  
January 2, 1977

ORDER OF WORSHIP  
11 A. M.

ORGAN  "Andante cantabile"  Rheinberger

CALL TO WORSHIP

HYMN NO. 397  "As With Gladness Men of Old"  No. 738

APOSTLES' CREED (standing)

GLORIA PATRI

***

SCRIPTURE  II Corinthians 5: 16 - 21

ANNOUNCEMENTS OF CONGREGATIONAL CONCERN

ANTHEM  "The Holy Birth"  Rowley

PRESENTATION OF THE OFFERING WITH THE DOXOLOGY

HYMN NO. 403  "Walk In the Light"

MEDITATION  "Beginning Again"  Mr. Clarke

PRAYER

***

THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY COMMUNION

The Kyrie (Choir)
The Invitation (No. 832)
The General Confession
The Prayer for Pardon
The Prayer of Consecration
The Prayer of Humble Access
The Agnus Dei
The Partaking of the Elements
The Prayer of Thanksgiving

HYMN NO. 509  "Great God, We Sing That Mighty Hand"

BENEDICTION

ORGAN  "Allegro"  Rheinberger

*** Interval for Ushering

AFTER THE SERVICE

The regular coffee hour will not be held today, but coffee is available along with some informal fellowship downstairs in the Community Room.

AN ADULT CLASS

An adult class meets every Sunday morning from nine-thirty to ten-thirty in the third floor Fellowship Hall. Mr. William Proctor serves as leader. Coffee is available and new members are always welcome.

USHERS

The ushers today are Mr. Monge, Mr. Breien, Mr. Brown, Mr. Davis, Dr. Hull, Mr. Tinge and Mr. Wood.

CHURCH SCHOOL

Sessions of church school for children are offered every Sunday morning from eleven to twelve. Classes meet on the third and fourth floors. Nursery care for infants and toddlers is available in the fourth floor.

PICK UP YOUR COPY

The latest edition of the Park Avenews / A Word In Edgeways is available this morning. Copies are located in the narthex and also in the Community Room.

BOXES OF OFFERING ENVELOPES

The 1977 boxes of offering envelopes are being distributed again today. They are on a table in the rear of the Community Room. Pick up a box that has your name on it and save the Church the postage expense.
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GENERAL OFFICERS
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Chairman, Administrative Board ........ Mr. Lee Myers
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Co-Chairmen, Membership Committee ........ Mr. Frank High
Ms. Beverly Limestall
Co-Chairmen, Day School ........ Mr. and Mrs. Jeffrey Hughes
Chairman, Ushers ........ Mr. Larry Morales
Coordinators, Adult Fellowship ........ Miss Cathy Syble
Superintendent, Sunday School ........ Miss Janet Ernst
SECOND SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS
January 1, 1984

ORDER OF WORSHIP
11 A.M.

ORGAN
"Choral Prelude" Bach

CALL TO WORSHIP
HYMN NO. 26 "Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty"
APOSTLES' CREED No. 738
GLORIA PATRI No. 792

SCRIPTURE Matthew 26: 26 - 29 Page 862
PARISH CONCERNS "The Shepherd's Carol" Billings

PRESENTATION OF THE OFFERING WITH THE DOXOLOGY
HYMN NO. 509 "Great God, We Sing That Mighty Hand"

SERMON "How To Make This Year Different" Mr. Clarke

PRAYER

THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY COMMUNION
The Kyrie (The Choir)
The Invitation (No. 832)
The General Confession
The Prayer for Pardon
The Prayer of Consecration
The Prayer of Humble Access
The Agnus Dei (The Choir)
The Partaking of the Elements

HYMN NO. 28 "O God, Our Help in Ages Past"

BENEDICTION
ORGAN "Fugue in B Minor" Bach

*** Interval for Ushering

We welcome Joyce Cartrell to the lectern today. A native of Michigan, a graduate of Albion, Joyce is a Librarian with Columbia University Libraries. Here in the church she serves as a Trustee, as Lay Delegate to the NY Annual Conference as well as a member of the Membership and the Pastor-Parish Relations Committees.

ALTAR FLOWERS

The flowers on the altar today are given by Ginger Haselden and Dan Green in celebration of their wedding this afternoon at five o'clock.

USHERS

The ushers today are Len Williams, Frank Bishop, William Murray, Ralph Nebelung, Kenneth Pew, Jonathan Wheeler and Charles Wire.

AN INVITATION

Coffee and tea will be served in the Russell Room following the service. Members and friends are invited to share in these moments of warmth made possible for us today by Nique Roosa, Michele Arnold, Judy Casciolini, Pauline Marsden and Marcie Wyrick.

CHURCH SCHOOL AND NURSERY CARE

Sessions of Church School for children are offered Sunday mornings from eleven to twelve. Nursery care for infants and toddlers is also available.

FINANCIAL CANVASS

The 1984 Financial Canvass is in its final moments. Pledge cards are still being gratefully received. Perhaps you can help us reach our goal of $100,000.