

# Resolve To Live

2 Corinthians 4:5-12; 16-18

2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Christmas

3<sup>rd</sup> January 2010

Two co-workers met at the office water-cooler one day. “Phil, I heard you flew to California on vacation,” said Irene. “I’ll bet that was great!” “No, Irene,” Phil replied, “actually that was bad. When I got there, I missed the bus from the airport to my hotel.” “Oh,” said Irene, “that’s bad.” “No,” Phil replied, “that wasn’t bad. I got a taxi, and the driver was very friendly.” Irene: “That’s good.” “No,” said Phil, “that’s bad. The transmission in the taxi broke before we even got away from the airport.” “Oh,” said Irene, “that’s bad!” “No,” Phil replied, “that was good. Reverse gear still worked, so we weren’t altogether stranded.” “Oh,” Irene said, “that’s good!” “No,” said Phil, “that’s bad. The driver decided to drive me all the way to my hotel, backwards.” “Whoa!” Irene replied, “That’s bad!” “No,” said Phil, “that was good. When we finally did get to the hotel, we discovered the meter had been running backwards so the driver owed me twenty six dollars and forty cents!”<sup>1</sup>

Whether this coming year is filled with good things that turn out to be bad or bad things that turn out to have a silver lining, one thing is certain, 2010 will contain a great deal of uncertainty. It will be predictable in its unpredictability. That’s not in question. Rather, the issue confronting us is how we will deal with this uncertain period of time that lies ahead.

The temptation is, of course, to resort to pessimism and defeatism. But let’s not go down that road. Let’s go down the road less travelled and develop more positive mental and spiritual attitudes to face the challenge of the unknown. And, to this end, let me offer you some suggestions as to what these attitudes might be.

Let us resolve, first of all, to live this coming year of 2010 believing in the power of small beginnings.

Writer, Keith Wagner, tells how he became convinced that the great could emanate from the little after a visit to the Andes in Peru. “A hundred feet above the Apurimac River, near the remote village of Huinchiri, Peru,” he says, “there is a suspension bridge that connects the Limi-Cuzzo Road. It has been there since the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Using four miles of braided coya grass, the Inca constructed the bridge in phases. First a bowman attached a fine thread to an arrow and fired it across the gorge. A man on the other side tied a cord to the thread and fired it back across the gorge. The cord was then pulled across. One by one the Inca added thicker and thicker ropes, finally hauling into place a 200 pound floor cable. The bridge which today is still suspended across the river continues to serve as a major highway for the people in that part of Peru. It began with a single thread.”

Wagner invites us to consider how many things in life begin similarly with a single thread. “Think,” he says, “how many changes take place in life because of a single phone call, the implementation of one idea, one visit, or a single letter. All great bridges stem from tiny beginnings. It is the same for our faith. A single act of forgiveness, a personal commitment to be more involved in the life of the church, a gift or an invitation to a stranger. Major construction is overwhelming. But every change that is made for the betterment of humankind starts with a single act. Isn’t that what God did with the birth of Christ? God introduced the possibility of total transformation with the gift of a child in a manger. In a remote place of the world and through a humble peasant couple, God set the stage for a new kingdom to emerge.”<sup>2</sup>

So let’s resolve this coming year to live believing in the power of small beginnings. But also let’s resolve to live believing in the power of undiscovered possibilities.

There’s a saying that people use these days that really annoys me. It’s “same old, same old.” You ask someone how they are getting along. “Oh, you know, same old, same old.” In other words, life’s just more of the same old stuff. Nothing new, nothing exciting. Been there, done that. B-o-o-o-o-oring! How was your Christmas? “Oh, you know, same old, same old.” The same old round of parties, the same old annoying relatives, the same old tedious hunt for gifts for people that have everything,

Then there are the people who have the “same old, same old” approach to the New Year. Nothing exciting happened this past year and the coming year will just be more of the same. After all, there’s never anything new under the sun. The more things change the more they remain the same. Yes, nothing to get excited about at the arrival of 2010. It’ll just be more of the same. Ho, hum!

Just supposing, though, we were to take a different approach and, rather than simply seeing sameness all around in this coming year, we were to look for the undiscovered possibilities that 2010 might hold. Suppose, further, we were to realise these undiscovered possibilities and bring them to fruition then think just how greatly they might enrich our own lives, the lives of others and even the life of our church. Hidden potential will certainly be all around us in the weeks and months that lie ahead, it will be there in the common events and circumstances as well as in the ordinary people with whom we share our lives – it just needs to be identified and developed by people who have eyes to see or ears to hear. People like ourselves.

In one of the Broom Hilda cartoons, Irwin – Hilda’s troll-like, naive, innocent little friend – puts on a long-tailed formal tuxedo jacket, picks up a conductor’s baton and walks into the woods alone. Standing on a fallen tree trunk, he begins to wave his arms as if to conduct. There are no musicians, only rocks, trees and flowers. Soon, musical notes pour from the rocks, trees and flowers and fill the cartoon panel. Finally, Irwin turns around and confidently says to the reader, “You know, the music is in there; you just have to work at getting it out.”<sup>3</sup>

Let’s resolve, therefore, to live this coming year believing in the power of unresolved possibilities. But, even more, let’s resolve to live believing in the power of single-minded perseverance. To live with an increased commitment to persevere past the point where we would normally give up.

In 1922, archaeologist Howard Carter had completed 15 years of digging in the famous Valley of the Kings in Egypt, hoping to find the royal tomb of Tutankhamen. But, after high hopes and much expectation, he had found no success. His search was proving fruitless and he was staring failure in the face. His benefactor, Lord Carnarvon, who had been funding Carter’s work for some years, was growing very impatient with the lack of progress. Knowing that he could not afford to pay the wages of his workers, Carter was about to call it a day and return to England. He was so convinced, though, that Tutankhamen’s tomb was there that he decided he would press on until the very last moment when he was absolutely forced to give up.

On 26 November 1922, with Carnarvon and his daughter watching sceptically over his shoulder, Carter drilled a small hole in the top left hand corner of a doorway at the top of what he believed to be the stairway to Tutankhamen’s tomb and he stuck an iron-testing rod into the dark, blank space. Then he inserted a candle into the hole and peered in. As his eyes grew accustomed to the light, details emerged into his view, and he saw strange animals, statues, and everywhere the glint of gold. He wrote of that moment, “I was struck dumb with amazement.” Carnarvon asked, “Can you see anything?” And Carter’s reply was, “Yes, I can see the most wonderful things.”<sup>4</sup>

Like Carter, St. Paul, in his time, also knew the value or perseverance past the point when common sense and reason would say, “Give up.” He too battled against the harsh elements of the Middle East, the heat and distance that challenged him on his amazing missionary journeys to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ. Paul also met with many other challenges. Unrelenting opposition to the Christian cause he was promoting. Efforts to undermine his newly-established churches. Accusations that he wasn’t a real apostle. Followers who wanted to return to the ways of the past. Those who were tempted to desert their faith, worshipping idols and indulging in

various types of immorality. Those who turned to violence against Paul and his followers in their opposition to the Christian cause. And this was not to speak of the disease and physical ailments that dogged Paul all his life and were a constant “thorn in the flesh”, threatening to discourage and depress him.

But Paul continued against all the odds. Pressing on when commonsense counselled surrender and acquiescence. Persevering when others would have given up and gone home. And nowhere does his indomitable spirit reveal itself more clearly than in that passage from 2 Corinthians, where he proclaims with great faith, “We are often troubled, but not crushed; sometimes in doubt, but never in despair; there are many enemies, but we are never without a friend; and though badly hurt at times, we are not destroyed. For this reason we never become discouraged. Even though our physical being is gradually decaying, yet our spiritual being is renewed day after day. And this small and temporary trouble we suffer will bring us a tremendous and eternal glory, much greater than the trouble. For we fix our attention, not on things that are seen, but on things that are unseen. What can be seen lasts only for a time, but what cannot be seen lasts forever.”<sup>5</sup>

So let us resolve to live throughout this coming year believing in the power of small beginnings and in the power of unresolved possibilities but, above all, believing in the power of single-minded perseverance. If these are the attitudes of mind and spirit we take with us into the coming months, then we can face the future with confidence, knowing that we are well equipped to face whatever challenges 2010 holds for us. And, if we have a faith in Jesus Christ like that of St. Paul, we can have the absolute confidence we will rise triumphantly above whatever comes our way.

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*St. Paul’s Presbyterian Church  
Peterborough, Ontario*

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<sup>1</sup> King Duncan, “Come Home for New Year’s”, [www.eSermons.com](http://www.eSermons.com), 2005

<sup>2</sup> Keith Wagner, “Possibilities Unlimited”, ChristianGlobe Networks, Inc.

<sup>3</sup> Russell Myers, *Broom Hilda*, Tribune Media Services. Quoted by Danny Cox & John Hoover, *Seize The Day*, Career Press, Hawthorne, NJ, 1994, p.81, also King Duncan, “Secret of a Great New Year”, eSermons.com, 2005

<sup>4</sup> King Duncan, “A Great and Wonderful New Year”, [www.eSermons.com](http://www.eSermons.com), 2005

<sup>5</sup> 2 Corinthians 4:8-10;16-18