

January 1, 2022

Psalm 139: 1-6, 13-18; Ephesians 2:1-10

"Becoming God's Masterpiece"

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Happy New Year! Can you believe that it's 2023?! As we stand at the beginning of a new year, we have something of a blank calendar in front of us with days ready to be filled. In some ways, it feels like a fresh start. In others, it seems like any other day. The reality is that it's both. As we turn the page of the calendar

to start a new year, it's a little like a birthday as you get older—it's kind of a natural time to pause and think about how life has been and to consider what we want our lives to look like in the days ahead. As one pastor/podcaster put it- it's a time to think about the happies and the crappies of the year because they often go side by side, each one pouring into who we are and how we see ourselves.

All that reflecting often brings us to think about changes that we want to make in our lives, things we want to do better-- How many of you made New Year's resolutions? How many have broken them already?

Every year, we think about the things that we want to change in ourselves—we want to lose weight, exercise more, eat better, maybe spend more time with family, read more, or pick up a new hobby. We spend a lot of time, and, let's be honest, we often spend a lot of money on "self-improvement. But, one resolution that I've never seen on any of the "top resolution" lists is one that we are called to every day—it's to become more of who God made us to be and to allow more of Jesus to show through us.

The gift of Jesus at Christmas was a gift of a new life for all of us—a new start- an opportunity to escape the prison we've put ourselves in and a chance to live the life that God created us for—to be us- fully us, the masterpieces that God created for the world.

So, hear these words from Ephesians that call us to a "new life" resolution: These are from the Message Interpretation, and I just loved how they put this passage today:

2 1-6 It wasn't so long ago that you were mired in that old stagnant life of sin. You let the world, which doesn't know the first thing about living, tell you how to live. You filled your lungs with polluted unbelief, and then exhaled disobedience. We all did it, all of us doing what we felt like doing, when we felt like doing it, all of us in the same boat. It's a wonder God didn't lose His temper and do away with the whole lot of us. Instead, immense in mercy and with an incredible love, He embraced us. He took our sin-dead lives and made us alive in Christ. He did all this on his own, with no help from us! Then he picked us up and set us down in highest heaven in company with Jesus, our Messiah.

7-10 Now God has us where He wants us, with all the time in this world and the next to shower grace and kindness upon us in Christ Jesus. Saving is all His idea, and all His work. All we do is trust Him enough to let Him do it. It's God's gift from start to finish! We don't play the major role. If we did, we'd probably go around bragging that we'd done the whole thing! No, we neither make nor save ourselves. God does both the making and saving. He creates each of us by Christ Jesus to join Him in the work He does, the good work He has gotten ready for us to do, work we had better be doing.

This passage is reminding us that for too long, we drag around the baggage of our mistakes, our anger, our guilt, the ways that we compare ourselves with others. God has other dreams for us- God wants us to live lives set free- lives made alive in Christ. Psalm 139 which Charlee read earlier in the service reminds us that God knew us from before we were born. He knows everything about us, and he "has us where He

wants us, with all the time in this world and the next to shower grace and kindness upon us in Christ.... He has created each of us in Christ Jesus to join Him in the work He does, the good work He's gotten ready for us to do. "

Jesus came as a baby so that we could be set free... to have a fresh start..... to be the person that God created us to be. As pastor and author, Nadia Bolz-Weber writes, "there is loosing to be done in this world. We are bound by our failures and mis-steps and the words we said in our worst moments. They form the bars in our spiritual prison cells. And we gotta take the keys out whenever we can and free each other – remind each other that we are forgiven.

We need to be loosed. Loosed from that which weighs us down, our sin, shame, and despair. Loosed from us our pride, anger and resentment and guilt for not being able to live up to even our own values. (Nadia Bolz-Weber, <https://thecorners.substack.com/p/confession-and-cancelation>).

Aidan and Reagan want to share with you a skit from the Skit Guys that helps us understand how we can be loosed from all the baggage that holds us down, from the bars of our spiritual prison cells so that we can be set free to live the new life that God has in store for us, not just at the new year, but every day....

As Aidan said, You are God's original masterpiece. You (yes you) are God's original masterpiece, formed for just such a time as this. There's a Meme that is floating around that says, "How cool is it that the God who created the mountains and the oceans and the galaxies looked at you and thought that the world needed one of YOU too!"

You don't have to hold back, and we don't have to do anything on our own. As Ephesians 2 says, "Now God has us where He wants us, with all the time in this world and the next to shower grace and kindness upon us in Christ Jesus. Saving is all His idea, and all His work. All we do is trust Him enough to let Him do it."

The question is: Will you resolve today, and every day, to allow God to show through you more and more each day? Will you trust God enough to let Him give you the new life that God wants for you? Will you pray with Aidan today, allowing God to remove the things that weigh you down so that you can be set free, to really be the Masterpiece that God created you to be? Will you open your heart to Christ so that you might be renewed as we enter the new year?

If your answer is yes, then I invite you to pray with me, from where you are at.... I encourage you to close your eyes and to open your hands on your laps. I invite you to repeat after me the words that Aidan read—you can do this either aloud or in your hearts so that it becomes our prayer today—and hopefully every day....

Dear God,

Today I want to turn everything over to you,
Help me to let go of what I need to.
Your word says you will make me your masterpiece
And use me to do great things.
I don't know how that's possible
But I want it with all my heart
So, please do whatever it takes
To make me what you want.
I love you God.
Amen.

Hear this good news to all: "In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven, loosed, set free of the prisons of our own making"

Now, repeat after me and say it like you mean it, "**I am God's masterpiece**"

The tiny babe that was born in the manger became the savior of the world—was born so that we might live lives set free.

One way that we start on this journey is to know more about who God created us to be, the first step toward keeping this resolution is to turn to our Scriptures. Let me just say that if you find reading the Bible to be confusing or feel like it doesn't make a lot of sense—I encourage you to pick a different translation. There are some good ones out there that might make a whole lot more sense to you— Check out Biblegateway.com or the Bible App by YouVersion. Each of these lets you try different translations for free. I like the Contemporary English Bible a lot. And, I'm also partial to *The Message*— Now, The Message version is actually a little more like poetry. God's word can speak to us so much louder when it's in words that we understand.....