

This is a New Year and a New Chapter

Genesis Ch12:1-9; Matthew Ch4:18-22

When it comes to that time between Christmas and New Year it is often a time for reflection, of consideration of the year that is coming to a close, that has just been, of reviewing what you have experienced and gone through. Sometimes we skim over the general stuff/events, other times we dwell on specifics, the highs the lows. Yet at this time of year when we go through this annual change it is a time to review and reflect on our past experiences. During this time we should be thankful to God for everything that He has done for us, in sustaining us and bringing us through every incident of this past year.

Equally so at this time of year we make resolutions, we make intentional decisions. We make our minds up and decide firmly to make improvements in our lives for the better, and we put our all into these new decisions that we have just made. There was a wee quote on a calendar in our house that said “Instead of writing a long list of New Year’s resolutions, choose two. Then work hard to keep them.” Irrespective of how long your New Year’s resolutions list is, the year ahead is a year of opportunities worth pursuing. Yet equally the year ahead also, for some, will hold uncertainty regarding jobs and health. In each case there is a fragility, a vulnerability, an unease, will it or won’t it work out for the best? There is therefore a fear that we experience as we transition from one year to the other. Fear is an unpleasant emotion caused by exposure to danger. The question is will that fear cripple us or will that fear be used as a catalyst to challenge and motivate us into action, to move forward in a positive way/light?

So whatever lies in front of us we have to decide whether to take the “Risk” and face the challenge of the future or resign ourselves to

accepting whatever comes our way. In our culture today we are encouraged/restricted to being risk averse. We are encouraged to play safe, we often hear the phrase “Health & Safety” that is code for ‘you can’t do anything that puts you or others in a place of danger’. Yes I do agree at times health & safety is important but not to the detriment of learning. To risk is to exercise faith. Faith is to have complete trust and confidence, a firm belief especially without logical proof, a system of religious belief, a duty of commitment to fulfil a trust, promise, obligation, allegiance etc. We must go beyond our comfort zones and willingly do everything to go out of our way to experience the risk and dangers of exercising our faith. Missiologists Michael Frost and Alan Hirsh challenge the church of today as they state:

The Christian community, at least as Jesus intended it, is one of the most exciting aspects of the gospel experience: the church is the frontier of the kingdom, the place where *it* all happens, where love lives, where the living witness to our Lord must take place... We will have to take risks, to chance failure, to be willing to walk away from familiar paths that have brought us to this point. It is clear that simply opting for more of the same is not going to resolve our problems. We must be willing to dream again, to innovate, and to risk the rejection of peers who think that the status quo is sufficient to the task. The church should be one of the most adventurous places on earth – the locus of all quest, the highly adaptive Jesus community at the very forefront of what God is doing in the world. But let’s be honest – this is not the case with the church-as-we-know-it.¹

Their passion of challenging the church of today to exercise their faith by taking risks is quite liberating, however the sadness as they conclude that this is not the reality for most churches is heartbreaking. The hour we spend together on a Sunday should be the most exciting hour of our week where we are encouraging and challenging one another in our faith and witness of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So often if we are honest with ourselves we desire a map to show us the way ahead, to show us the specifics of what we can expect [**ADLIB**: 5maps in our car 2x general UK, Scotland, 3x specific Edinburgh, West Lothian, Falkirk & surrounding areas]. We want a stage by stage guide for

¹ Michael Frost & Alan Hirsh., *The Faith of Leap: Embracing a Theology of Risk Adventure & Courage* (Michigan: Baker Books, 2011), 22-23.

the direction that we are going in. To have this means that someone has to have been there before us and taken the time to draw the map in detail. Yet what if God is calling us to be the cartographer, the map makers of our day and generation? What would it cost us?

The more and more that I read Scripture the more and more I see that God does not give all the details, He gives the basics details. For example in Genesis Ch12:1-9 [**READ**] God informed Abram at 75years of age to leave his country, relatives and family and **GO** to the land that He would show them. No other information given. Take that step of faith and risk everything and then I will bless you and make you famous, you will be a blessing to others, I will bless you and I will curse those who treat you with contempt. All the families on the earth will be blessed through you.

No map with specific details was given, just the basic information. They packed up their belongings [this detail not given by God] and headed off as God called them to do into the land of Canaan. They walked the land building alters and worshipping God. Then a severe famine struck the land. How can this be? Is God wrong? Why a severe famine? This is a test of faith and character. We remember the story of the Exodus taken from captivity into the desert and wandered for 40 years, yet during this time some people wanted to head back to Egypt to captivity and what they had only known. But there is a Promised Land ahead if only we do not give up.

[**READ**: Matthew Ch4:18-22] When Jesus called His Disciples He gave them basic details, very basic details, **Come, follow me** and once your following me **I will show you how to fish for people**. No matter who it was, the challenge given by God was to have faith in Him, trust and exercise risk, faith in Jesus then exercise risk. The challenge that God gives His people is to trust in Him have faith don't look for the specifics as

you take that step of faith He will reveal Himself to you and He will lead you along this journey as you place not only your hand but commit your life to Him.

I wonder at the start of this year as we make our resolutions that one of them is that we would all assist in making our gatherings the best hours of the week. That we would encourage and inspire one another to grow in our faith so that when we go into the weeks ahead we would be an inspiration to those who we come in contact with. That in those engagements we would be the Servant of God who brings the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the lost, lonely tired, weary and far from home of our world, that they would through the encounter with us come into a living and loving relationship with God and call on Him to be their Lord and Saviour. Life with Jesus Christ is a Great Adventure, don't get stuck in the mud, muck, the mire. Lift up your heads to the coming King, always look into Jesus He is the answer. This is a New Year and a New Chapter in our walk with Jesus.