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Sermon 10 January 2021

Resolved 1: With All Your Mind

- Good morning church—we are so thankful that you have joined us for worship this morning. I hope that you are having a good first full week of 2021—and I know that so far 2021 has felt an awful lot like 2020, but I am hopeful that in time we will find that this year is different—that things are getting better and better.
- Today we begin a four-week sermon series called “Resolved.”
- “Resolved” is a word that a lot of people have been using for the past ten days or so, as they made their lists of New Year’s Resolutions—as they used the passing of 2020 and the beginning of 2021 as an opportunity to improve their lives, or to improve themselves in some way.
- So they make a list of things they’re going to start doing—or stop doing—or do more of—things that will improve in some way some aspect of themselves—their physical health, or their intellect, or their contribution to their community--their list might be made up of things like, “Resolved, I will lose 30 pounds in 2021,” or “resolved, I will read a book each week in 2021,” or “resolved, I will volunteer for charity 40 hours each month.”
- I heard from someone this week—well, Jim Barclay is who it was that I heard this from—and I hope he’ll forgive me if I don’t get this quite right, but he told me that New Year’s resolutions are like a noisy, misbehaving child in church—they ought to be carried out. Now don’t get offended if you have noisy kids that you like to take

into the sanctuary (when we're not in lockdown, I mean)—that joke is about somebody else's kids. Unfortunately, however, most resolutions are not carried out.

- Research has found that about half of us—50% of people—make New Year's resolutions—they actually write them down in a list—but research has also found that the majority of people fail to keep those resolutions, and by the first week of February folks have given up on that list of things that seemed like it was going to change their lives this year—those things that they had decided they were going to do that would make 2021 different –and better.
- And the fact that most people fail is a testament to the simple truth that there is a big difference between making resolutions and actually being resolved—between writing down a list of things to do and actually having the determination, the resolve, to follow through with them.
- There are lots of reasons that people will give as excuses for why they failed to keep their resolutions—and many of them are more than just excuses—they are valid reasons—things like “my resolutions were unrealistic,” or “my resolutions weren't specific enough,” or “I didn't keep track of my progress,” or “I just forgot about them.”
- One of the most important excuses--one that you hear very often is “I didn't keep my resolutions because I made too many of them.” I went to make my list of resolutions and I just kept thinking of things that I need to do, or that I'd like to do, or that other people, people I want to be like, do—and my list just kept getting longer—Resolved, I will lose 30 pounds this year;” resolved, I will get a gym membership; resolved, I will work out at the gym 5 times every week; resolved, I will stop eating at McDonald's; resolved, I will stop eating red meat; resolved, I will

become a vegan”---and if you just start making a list of everything that comes into your mind that you’d LIKE to do or be, pretty soon you realise that you’ve just got a list of wishes, and not a list of resolutions

- As Christians, we could do the same thing if we used the New Year as an opportunity to compile a list of ways that we could resolve to improve our relationship with Jesus, or grow in our faith, or strengthen our walk and our witness—things like “Resolved, I’ll read a chapter of the Bible every day; resolved, I’ll pray for 30 minutes every morning at 6:30; resolved, I’ll increase my giving to the church by 10%; resolved, I’ll show up for church and Bible studies every time they’re scheduled—online or in person.”
- But pretty soon we’d see that making a list like that is also an endless task—all of these things we could list that we’re going to do are certainly good ideas—but what would really be helpful is if there were a way we could determine which, of all the resolutions we could make, are the most important—just a few—or maybe just a couple—or maybe even just one—the greatest resolution
- Fortunately, Jesus has helped us out with that. In Mark 12, verses 28-31, Jesus is asked which commandment—which thing that we should resolve to do—which resolution that we could make—is the greatest?
- And Jesus answers with 2 commandments—and you’re probably familiar with them: you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength--and you shall love your neighbour as yourself.
- And in this sermon series, Pastor Tasha and I want to challenge you—and ourselves—to make these commands our resolutions as a church—as members of

the body of Christ—and we can divide these two commandments up into four “resolutions”—and what’s interesting is that each of these four resolutions addresses a different aspect, a different component, of human nature, of what it means to be a whole person —and so as we enter 2021, let’s resolve to do these four things:

- Let’s each of us resolve to love the Lord with all our mind--that addresses the mental component of a person, the intellect, our thinking
 - Let’s resolve to love the Lord with all our strength-- that addresses the physical component of a person—that bodily aspect
 - Let’s resolve to love the Lord with all our heart and soul--that’s the spiritual aspect of a person
 - Now Jesus doesn’t stop there—He doesn’t ONLY make these commands all about individuals and their association with God, because people are relational—we live in community with other people—and so finally, let’s each resolve to love our neighbour as ourself—that resolution addresses the relational aspect of what it means to be a person
- Over the next 4 Sundays, we’re going to look at 4 passages of scripture that contain the word “resolve” or “resolved” in English. And as we explore these scriptures, we’re also going to be exploring those four resolutions, and the four components of a person that they are connected to--and each week we’re going to see how those scriptures can help us strengthen our resolve to live up to each of those commands, those resolutions—mentally, physically, spiritually and relationally.
 - Today we’re going to begin with the mental aspect, and we’re going to examine how just a few verses, verses 18-20 of the first chapter of Matthew, can help us to

understand what it means to “Love the Lord with all your mind,” and encourage us to resolve to do so.

- Now before I get any phone calls or emails, let me just say that yes, I know that Christmas is over and that today is January 10, but if you’ll indulge me, I believe that this is the scripture that God would have us think about for a little while this morning, and I believe God has something important to say to each and every one of us through the word today.
- Now we said that we were looking at scriptures with the word “resolve” in them, so let’s start there, in verse 20: But just when he had resolved to do this—now the “he” in this situation is Joseph, and we know that he had resolved to do something, but to find out what, we need to back up to verse 18 and get the whole story, and there we read: Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly.
- This is a familiar story to all of us, I suspect. Mary is pregnant, Joseph knows the child can’t possibly be his, and so he plans to break up with her quietly—maybe let her go live with relatives out in the country somewhere so this disgraceful situation doesn’t get out, he plans to do this, decides it’s the best course of action, and then goes to sleep—but in his dreams an angel appears to him and tells him that Mary hasn’t been unfaithful, but that her child is from the Holy Spirit, and if you follow the story on down to verse 25, we read that the angel explains to Joseph who the child Mary is carrying is and what he should name him, and when he wakes up, Joseph does what the angel tells him to and takes Mary as his wife—and we know the rest of the story.

- We're all very familiar with this story, and you may be wondering how 3 verses, verses 18-20, tell us anything about being resolved to love the Lord with all your mind—and that's a fair question—and that's what I want us to consider as we examine these 3 verses.
- The Rev. Dr William Barber often says that we read scripture entirely too quickly sometimes—that we need to slow down and let the word speak to us as we listen—and so this morning I want to slow down and let the meaning and the message of these 3 verses be made manifest to us.
- And so I want to begin by looking at that word in verse 20, “resolved.” When Joseph had resolved to do this. Now we know what the English word “resolved” means—it means he had made a firm decision, he had determined to execute what he had planned. He had made a resolution and it would be carried out.
- But in the original Greek the word that is translated “resolved” there carries more significance. The root word in the Greek is *enthumeomai* (en-thoo-meh'-om-ah-ee) and it is a verb that means to meditate upon, to reflect upon, to ponder—and even more than this, it refers to “passionate supposing and surmising in a person's mind, producing fervent, inner cogitation”—that is, it means to think long and hard about something.
- And so the word *enthumeomai* tells us that Joseph didn't just come up with a plan and quickly and superficially say “yep, that's what I'm gonna do.” No this word tells us that Joseph made a plan and then thought about it intensely—examined it critically—asked “what if” and considered it from every angle—he arduously wrestled with it using all the power of his intellectual faculties—and only after that gruelling mental work did he say “This is the plan,” and fell asleep, exhausted.

- I want to briefly point out one more word here and that is the word “planned” in verse 19—he “planned” to dismiss her quietly. Now we have already seen that the word there for “resolved” lets us know that this was no simple, easy decision for Joseph, but one that he wrestled with intellectually for some time—and that message that Matthew is relating is strengthened by his use of the Greek word “*boulomai*” (boo'-lom-ahee) which is translated “planned.” *Boulomai* literally means to will or intend, and so doesn’t refer to a quickly formulated scheme that “might work,”—something about which we might say “well, here’s an option—we could try this”—no *boulomai* means to plan with FULL RESOLVE and determination—it refers to the making of a plan in which every action and outcome and situation has been resolutely put into place, in which every moving part has been methodically placed to fulfil the intention, the will, of the planner.
- Remember that Joseph is a craftsman—he knows that haste makes waste—he knows that you can’t just build something without a plan, whether it’s a house or a table or a bookshelf—you have to consider your materials, and how what you’re making is going to be used, and design it to achieve the desired outcome—so that it does what you want it to do
- And what is that desired outcome? What is Joseph’s plan designed to do? Matthew tells us in verse 19—Joseph was unwilling to expose her to public disgrace—and to achieve that goal, that desired end, Joseph painstakingly plans (*boulomai*) and then thoroughly scrutinises and deliberates (*enthumeomai*) about that plan—
- And all that adds up to the fact that he THOUGHT faithfully and thoroughly—about his situation and what he needed to do—and I believe Matthew tells us why Joseph takes his thinking so seriously and devotedly in verse 19 when he writes, “Her

husband Joseph, being a righteous man.” I believe Matthew shows us a picture here in Joseph of what it means to resolve to love the Lord your God with ALL your mind.

- I want to share with you three commands, three instructions that we can take away from these verses today—and these three instructions answer the question: HOW do we resolve to love the Lord with all our mind—how do we resolve to love the Lord mentally—with our intellect? And the first answer to that question, the first instruction is this.
- Think. Think deeply. With ALL your mind. When Jesus tells us to love the Lord with all our mind in the gospel of Mark, the word used for mind is *dianoia* and it does mean the mind or the intellect, but Jesus could have just used the second half of that word to mean “mind”—the *noia* part—instead he uses the prefix *dia*—across, from side to side (like “diameter” and “dialectic”)—and *dianoia* refers to the use of the mind to see all sides of an issue, to contemplate fully and analytically, to consider the entirety of something—it refers to full-breadth reasoning—critical thinking—thinking with both sides of your brain—and that is exactly what Matthew tells us Joseph does, being a righteous man.
- But I think that as important as what Joseph DOES, is what Joseph DOESN'T DO
- Matthew tells us: Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly
- But if Joseph were another sort of man, Matthew could have told us: Joseph, being a religious man with respect for the letter of the Law, planned to hand her over to the temple authorities for punishment for her sin—and we know what can happen to a woman guilty of sexual sin--but Matthew doesn't say that

- Matthew also doesn't say: Joseph, being a jealous man and knowing that he wasn't the father of the child, rushed out immediately to find the man who was responsible and seek revenge—he could've thought, "I bet it's that tentmaker, Simon, I see the way he looks at her"—no--nor does Matthew say:
- Joseph, being a proud man and wanting to save face, decided to tell all his friends and neighbours how he'd been betrayed and done wrong and make sure they knew what kind of person this fallen woman Mary really was
- No, Joseph is not driven by pride or legalism or jealousy—he doesn't lose his cool and fly off the handle—an angel doesn't have to bar the door to keep him from doing something impulsive—because Joseph is righteous and thoughtful—and when he thinks the situation through, righteousness doesn't look like punishment or vengeance, righteousness doesn't insist that a price be paid for laws that might have been broken or offense that might have been taken—no, righteousness looks like mercy and grace
- And part of the reason Joseph's righteousness looks like mercy is because he doesn't know all the details. What he knows is that the girl he is engaged to be married to is pregnant—and the baby isn't his—but that's all he knows—he doesn't know the circumstances that led to it—he doesn't know what part Mary played, if any—she may have had no choice or maybe she just made a foolish mistake
- And so Joseph has to look at the evidence he has and discern its meaning, and a course of action
- I'm reminded of the words of Paul in the 12th chapter of Romans: Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.

- This is what Joseph is doing—discerning the best steps to take next—what is good and acceptable and perfect—and we are called to do the same.
- But Joseph doesn't know all the details—he must be thoughtful and discerning because he doesn't know everything.
- And that's the second instruction for us: Think, but remember you don't know everything
- And not knowing everything is not an excuse to avoid thinking critically and deeply and thoroughly—loving God with all your mind, no,
- Because we don't know everything, we need to be open to new information—new ideas, new perspectives, new reports of what's happening in the world and in research—in every field you've got any interest in—investigate it—all truth is God's truth—ALL truth is GOD's truth---but remember that all information isn't good information
- We live in the information age, and the total sum of human knowledge—things that we know—things that are factual—real data—is doubling each day—but alongside that mind-boggling increase in knowledge is a competing increase in false information—so that discernment we just talked about is more important than perhaps it's ever been
- And good information was important for Joseph too—knowing that Mary was pregnant, he could have easily asked around town, making some inquiries to different people—you know, asking “Hey, you know Mary? Has she been maybe seeing somebody on the side? Or just hypothetically, if she were pregnant, whose might it be?” I am sure that Joseph could have acquired a considerable amount of “information” that way—people like to gossip, and they like to speculate, they like to

think they have some access to some secret knowledge even when they don't, and so Joseph could have gotten information, but likely would not have gotten GOOD information---it likely would not have been the TRUTH.

- And if he HAD talked to a handful of people, Joseph might have heard all sorts of conflicting stories and theories and probably more than a few outright lies—and so he might have gotten to the point where he said “I just don't know who to believe!”
- But Joseph didn't do that—and neither should we. Joseph didn't seek out sources of information that wouldn't have provided him with the truth—and neither should we.
- The Apostle Paul wrote to the church at Philippi: Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.
- If the information you're receiving, the stuff you are thinking about, has your head in a place where you're living in anxiety and suspicion and accusation and mistrust and disorientation—that's just where the devil wants you to be. You find you some truth, you find you something pure, something just, something noble and pleasing and commendable—if there is ANYTHING worthy of praise—think on those things.
- If my Dad said it to me once he said it to me a thousand times—God is not the author of confusion, but of peace. And if what you're thinking about—the information you're getting-- causes you to be constantly confused and fearful and apprehensive and to lose your joy and your peace--If you're thinking on a bunch of information that's untrue and impure and unpleasant and dishonourable—gossip and conspiracy theories and baseless divisive accusations—you leave that mess

alone—it is not of God and the people of God have no business wasting their God-given ability to think thinking about it.

- Finally, let's look at the third instruction that we can take away from these few verses here.
- And that is this:
 - Allow God to have the last word.
- We have seen that Joseph gives us an example of loving God with all his mind, all his *dianoia*, his critical thinking, as he strenuously and carefully plans and then methodically and exhaustingly examines that plan.
- And when that plan is done, when he has reviewed and analysed it and reached resolution, he doesn't rush out to execute it—he doesn't say, "That's it, I have come up with the appropriate response to this situation, all by myself, I have carefully weighed all the evidence and information I have available to me, and I have reached the perfect conclusion—may my will be done! Let's do this—right now!"
- No, Joseph is in no hurry, and even though he has done the work of thinking and planning and is resolved to put this plan into place—he waits.
- And I believe it shows Joseph's wisdom that he puts such effort into the creation and revision of the plan he makes, and then he sleeps on it.
- I have heard some scholars say that Joseph might have been a man of some age—I don't really know how old he was, but I know this—he was old enough to know that things can look one way in the evening, but then look different in the morning. He was old enough to know that when you go to bed at night, your body might stop moving and working, but your mind keeps going.

- And the way your brain works during the night is different from the way it works during the day, but it's still thinking, it's still problem solving, it's still reflecting on everything you've seen and heard, and it's still listening, and while your awareness of the world outside your mind fades away in sleep, your awareness of the world inside your mind, made manifest in dreams, becomes remarkably keen—so much so that people have made radical changes in their beliefs, in their lives, in the way they understand things, because of things they have seen and things that have happened to them in their dreams—which is another way of saying “in their thoughts,” or “in their mind.”
- And so it is not unimportant, I think, that the angel of the Lord does NOT appear to Joseph in the empirical world, not in the physical world—in the world outside his mind—in his room or in a field or in the sky—no, the angel of the Lord appears to him in a dream.
- And that word that Matthew uses for “dream” **only** ever refers to a dream that a person has while sleeping—it is not a vision or an apparition or even a daydream—it refers to a dream that takes place in your mind while you are asleep.
- That word Matthew uses—that word is “onar,” by the way-- it occurs 6 times in the New Testament—and every one of those 6 times is in Matthew's gospel—Matthew tells us an angel appeared to Joseph here in chapter 1 and three times in chapter 2—there the Magi are also warned in a dream not to return to Herod, and then in chapter 27, Pontius Pilate's wife tells him not to have anything to do with Jesus, because he's innocent—she knows this because she is troubled by a dream she had.
- And I think this is more than just an interesting detail in Matthew's gospel—I think Matthew is reminding us of another aspect of loving God with all your mind—and

that is that it's not just about the conscious work of thinking and analysing and calculating and striving for understanding that loving God with all your mind is about—it's not all about what WE do or what WE have to say—it's also about waiting for what God does, and listening for what God has to say—with our minds—with our thoughts—it's about being humble and discerning enough NOT to say "well that was just a dream"—that's true of some dreams, certainly, but some dreams are not "just a dream."

- And so Joseph stops his activity, Joseph waits upon the Lord, and God speaks to Joseph in a dream.
- And even though he has spent considerable time and energy on his own plan, when the angel of the Lord appears in his dream and tells him what the situation is, and tells him what he needs to do—Joseph doesn't argue—he doesn't say, "but I've already got a plan. I put a lot of effort into this thing, so I'm just going to stick with my plan. I've thought this thing out and what I'm going to do is this." You'll remember Jonah did that—God told him what to do and he said "no, I'm going to do something else"—and you'll remember where that got him. No, Joseph allows God to have the last word, and he doesn't argue.
- Joseph doesn't even ask for clarification like Mary does in Luke's gospel—she asks Gabriel, "well how is this going to work? Explain the logistics to me." And there's nothing wrong with that at all—that's commendable—but Joseph has a different personality, and a different experience, because the angel of the Lord appears to Joseph IN HIS MIND and not OUTSIDE of it—and so Joseph just wakes up and does what he's been told to do.

- So this morning I want to challenge you, and me, all of us as the church, as the body of Christ, to make this first of four resolutions—to resolve to love the Lord with all our minds. How do we do that? I believe these verses in Matthew’s gospel make it clear—three instructions:
 - First, think. Think deeply. With ALL your mind. Remember that thinking is an act of worship, that critical thinking is a way that Jesus commands us to love the Lord.
 - Second, think, but remember you don’t know everything. And because you don’t know everything, get good information, and stay away from bad information--whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.
 - And finally: Allow God to have the last word. Listen. Don’t dismiss what God may be saying to you in those times when you are not actively “thinking”—in those times when your mind is in “listening” mode and not in “speaking” mode.” Take time to wait, to rest, to hear from God.
 - I hope you’ll make this resolution with me this morning, and I believe there are great days ahead for every one of us—great days ahead for the church—great days for our community--great days for the Kingdom—beyond what we could ask for or even imagine. God bless you today.