



ONE VOICE



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From the Pastor's Desk

"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." Hebrews 13:8



Soon the bells ringing in Christmas Day will give way to the sound makers ringing in a New Year. As we enter a New Year, we cannot help but look to the past and survey the history of the year past. We list the historical high lights or sometimes even the low lights of the year. We listen to the countdown of the top 100 hits of the year, waiting with anticipation of what will be the number one song of the Year. We take survey of our own lives. We remember the joys of the year. We remember the disappointments. We remember the sadness of losing those we love. As we celebrate the coming of the New Year, counting down the seconds, making noise and celebrating the end of one year and the beginning of another, we can't help but wonder what the New Year will bring.

Even though I do not have a crystal ball which allows me to view the future, I do have an idea of some of the events the New Year will bring. Having fully enjoyed the many Christmas parties and Christmas gatherings, we will avoid the scale and think about New Year Resolutions that involve going to the gym or joining a gym or least try a diet and some exercise for a while. As our clothes fit a little tight, we will stay with the new resolution for a while at least. Then the good food breaks down our resolve and we promise to exercise more in the warm weather of spring.

This year will be a historic year for our country as we enter the year of electing a new president. We start it off in Iowa with our Caucuses sorting out candidates we think will be a good leader. There will be debates. There will be lots and lots of political commercials, which after a while will leaving us longing for the commercials about Preparation H. In November, we will either re-elect President Trump or elect someone else as President. It is a marvelous exercise in Democracy. We the people will choose our leaders from the President on down to our County Supervisors and there will be a peaceful and celebrated handing over of power and authority to those newly elected.

This year, in the Northeastern Iowa Synod, we will be electing a new Bishop. Due to health and other reasons, Bishop Ullestad communicated to us a year ago, that he will not seek re-election at the end of his term, which will be in September of this year. So for the first time in decades, our Synod will not have a Bishop running for re-election. All the Assistants to the Bishop have co-terminus calls, which means they will resign when the new Bishop is elected. Some of the Assistants and people in the office may be asked to continue serving. It all depends upon the new Bishop. So in June, when we gather together as an Assembly, we will be praying for the guidance of the Holy Spirit to lift up a new Pastor for our Northeastern Iowa Synod. We have no idea right now who the new Bishop may be, nor do we know who will be our Synod staff. A time of

excitement, a time of anxiety and most certainly a time of prayer.

This New Year will also bring a new planting season. We hope it will be different than last year, with a wet spring, making planting late, and a wet fall, early winter hampering the harvest season. The prices for crops were not good and the cost of inputs keep a rising. Yuck! We are glad the 2019 season for farmers is past and we hope for a much better 2020 season. Another time of uncertainty, a time of anxiety, certainly a time of prayer.

As the year progresses on, one day leading into the next, one week into the next, one month into the next, we will experience a number of changes. Some students will be confirmed. In May, high school and college students will become graduates. New beginnings, new challenges, a time of uncertainty, a time of anxiety, certainly a time of prayer.

In all this newness that we face, we also will experience new technology, new sales to buy new products, changes of our health, families will change as students move on to different chapters of their lives, babies will be born, we will lose loved ones. A time of uncertainty, a time of anxiety, certainly a time of prayer.

Facing all these changes, the writer of Hebrews invites us to rest in Jesus. *"Jesus is the same yesterday and today and forever."* No matter the multitude of changes coming our way, Jesus is still Lord of Lords and King of Kings. Jesus is still the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. Jesus holds us in his arms. He has held you in the beginning of your life, your present, and he holds your future. Jesus is faithful in his promises. Jesus promises to be with you always through the ages. Jesus pronounces you forgiven, when you come seeking forgiveness. Jesus reconciles you with your Heavenly Father, restoring and renewing your relationship. Jesus gives you his peace of being your Lord. Jesus gives you his peace of claiming you with his love. Jesus gives you his peace of giving you his kingdom. Jesus gives you the kingdom of God as your inheritance. Jesus is present with his Holy Spirit dwelling in your hearts. Jesus and the Holy Spirit hear the prayers of your heart. Jesus hears the concern and anxiety about all this newness, this uncertainty of what the future holds. Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever. Jesus is your Lord, who claims you with his love. Jesus is your Lord walking with you. Jesus is faithful. So in this New Year, these times that can bring excitement, anxiety, and uncertainty, spend time in prayer with the one, whose love and faithfulness is the same rock you can always count on. Happy New Year! Enjoy the adventures with Jesus walking alongside you.

Pastor Randy



WANDERINGS AND WONDERINGS



“What did you expect?”

That is the question I often want to ask people, in a host of situations. Many times I have heard a sentiment of disappointment after a much anticipated event. “It wasn’t what I hoped for.” “I’m disappointed. I had hoped for something more.” Even the ambiguous statement, “Ah, it was OK.” And I want to ask them, “What did you expect?”

In fact, I have asked that question on occasion, and rarely have I heard anything really profound or anything that was really disappointing.

Sometimes everything they hoped for and expected, actually happened, but they still walk away from it feeling they missed something. And the most dubious answer that I have heard is along the lines “I didn’t know what to expect” or “I didn’t expect anything special.” So why are we disappointed? What did we sub-

consciously expect that wasn’t fulfilled?

I am raising the question along the lines of Christmas, and of Jesus. Sometimes Christmas doesn’t live up to the hype for some people. All that time. All that energy. All that money.

And what do we have to show for it? Some weariness and some bills.

And even on the spiritual side of things, we sometimes feel short-changed. We romanticize Christmas’ of the past, and this year just doesn’t live up to the “spiritual high” we remember from years ago. What did we expect? What was missing?

In the weeks past, one gospel reading had John the Baptist asking of Jesus, “Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?” This is the one who didn’t want to baptize Jesus, because he felt unworthy. This is the one who said, “There goes the Lamb of God.” His question, leaves us the impression that Jesus is quite living up to John’s expectations? That John expected something else, something more.

We go into Christmas, and come to Jesus with expectations. But sometimes we have to ask, are our expectations faithful? Are our expectations of what God is offering us? Are our expectations God-centered or are they “me-centered”? Or sometimes I simply ask myself, “And where did I get that idea?”

Christmas is emotionally loaded. Some of the emotions are exciting and positive and joyful. Some people’s emotions are quite negative – filled with bad memories and anticipations. The season is emotionally loaded. And with those emotions comes expectations –

again good and bad expectations. We remember Christmas’ past cumulatively. And rarely does any one Christmas or event live up to all those memories and expectations.

When it comes to Christmas, even on the safe side of things (spiritually speaking), we sometimes get lost and thus disappointed. We work to keep the true meaning of Christmas in Christmas. Jesus. Mary. Joseph. The manager. A baby is born. The heavenly host praising God. Shepherds bearing witness to what they saw.

Wise men bearing gifts to the newly born. Those thoughts should keep us in the right state of mind. But even that focus can leave us feeling empty, if we miss the proclamation of the story.

The proclamation. We sing it in our hymns. We read it in our Scripture. We proclaim it in our actions.

Joy to the world, the Lord has come!

Let earth receive its King.

Born the King of angels.

Hail the heav’n born Prince of Peace. Hail the sun of righteousness!

Glo...ri...a...in excelsis Deo.

Jesus...save people from their sins...Emmanuel, God is with us...

King of the Jews...he will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign ...forever...to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord...my eyes have seen your salvation...a light for the revelation to the Gentiles...light that shines in the darkness...the Word was God...the Word became flesh and lived among us.

What happened ... is so much more than what our imaginations can grasp. So much more than our expectations can imagine. So much more...

Keep your eyes open...and your minds wide...to let God surprise you again, and again, and again. For God has much to offer you this Christmas, and every Christmas. Don’t box God in (*even if it has pretty paper and a ribbon*), but let God open your heart and mind and life to the joys and promises that dwell in Him, Him who has come to live among us, Him whom we call Lord and Savior.

Have a blessed and Blessed Christmas!

Wanderings and Wonderings,
Pastor Bill Peter

