



ONE VOICE



Churches: ♦Bethany ♦Immanuel ♦Lunder ♦Silver Lake ♦Winnebago

Pastor Randy Baldwin & Pastor Bill Peters

Volume 14, Issue 1

January 2021

From the Pastor's Desk

"And the one who was seated on the throne said, 'Behold, I am making all things new.' Also he said, 'Write this for these words are trustworthy and true.' Then he said to me, 'It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.'" Revelation 21:5-6



After Christmas, there is a natural let down. After all, many stores started celebrating Christmas sales in October if not sooner. The Church has four weeks of Advent in which we talk about being ready, being prepared for Jesus coming again on the clouds with his angels and preparing ourselves spiritually to celebrate his coming as a babe born in a manger. Christmas is normally a wonderful season. People decorate their homes outside with beautiful Christmas lights. The lights provide a beauty and reminder of the hope of the True Light coming into to our world, when the nights are long and there is so much darkness. People decorate their homes inside with Christmas Trees, which the evergreen tree reminds us of the gift of eternal life we receive as a gift from our Lord Jesus. Many homes have some nativity scenes depicting the unexpected birth of our Lord Jesus to young Mary in a manger with shepherds and Wisemen looking on with wonder of God made flesh, now becoming Immanuel, God with us. The Sanctuaries are also decorated with greens and lights as favorite Christmas Carols are sung, candles flicker as voices sing of a "Silent Night, Holy Night." The message of Christmas is filled with hope and love.

'Twas the day after Christmas.



We try to live out the message of love and hope as families gather together. There is joy and shouts of greetings as people walk in the door with bundles of presents and often with food to add to the feast. Hugs are given. Children are asked to step up to a wall, where there are marks indicating their growth since the last time they visited. Coffee and water is shared as people listen to the stories of what is happening in their lives with work, school, athletics, music. Then gifts, which have been carefully and lovingly selected and wrapped, are shared. There are moments of surprise and joy of the gifts given. The Christmas feast is eaten and stories are shared around the table. Later perhaps, there are naps, games played inside and outside. There are looks with raised eyebrows of parents looking at Grandparents as a child is playing with a noisy toy, a gift from Grandma and Grandpa, as they know they have at least a few weeks of a noisy household when they arrive home. Memories are shared and memories are made. Then, sadly one by one, families begin to load up children, gifts and empty bowls and hugs are given as farewells are said, with a last greeting of Merry Christmas.

There is bound to be a let down after all the celebrations. After all these celebrations, there is a return to the long dark winter nights. So we lift up our spirits by looking forward to celebrating a New Year.

Almost everyone is ready to leave 2020. It has been a contentious year by almost everyone's standards. We were suddenly locked down in our homes, with churches closed, schools closed, restaurants closed, stores closed as the pandemic swept through our nation. Family gatherings for weddings and funerals were limited. Trips to visit loved ones in the nursing home or hospital were stopped. In the midst of all those interruptions, we witnessed the pain of racism tear at the fabric of our communities. We were inundated with negative political ads in a divisive election. The only things we celebrated were births, baptisms, confirmations, graduations and weddings, which were all smaller than usual. Vaccines are being sent out and so we look forward to a New Year, where we hope to leave the pandemic behind and a return to some normalcy. We count down the old Year and ring in the New Year.

We like the "New" in the New Year. We have a new beginning. We like to think of starting with a clean slate. We begin a New Year full of new hopes. The problem is that it doesn't take long and the promise of "new" and veneer of hope of a "new beginning" begins to crack and some of the old reappears. The Pandemic is still present along with its interruptions. Politics is still divisive. The brokenness of relationships begins to reveal itself as hurtful words and actions are taken.

Jesus is the one, who can truly make all things new, really new. Jesus is the one, who truly gives you a clean slate. Jesus declares you forgiven, and your sins are truly gone. You are reconciled to your Heavenly Father. Jesus makes you new, as he fills your heart with the power of his Holy Spirit who creates faith, love, patience, joy and more. Jesus makes relationships new as He brings his love, forgiveness and reconciliation into your relationships with others. Jesus makes your day new, as he walks alongside you, encouraging you, helping you face each challenge, celebrating each victory. Jesus comforts your sorrows as he gifts you with his victory over death. Jesus walks with you in times of sadness, then promises you, He has given the gift of eternal life to you and to your loved one. Jesus will reunite you with your loved ones in his Father's house one day. One day, Jesus will make all things new, where there will be no more sin, no more hunger, no more thirst, no more sorrow. Jesus will make all things new.

So as we enter the New Year, remember the one who can truly make all things new, is Jesus your Lord. Happy New Year! Enter the journey of the New Year with your Lord, who is the Alpha and the Omega, the one who brings new beginnings.

Pastor Randy



WANDERINGS AND WONDERINGS



2020 - What a year!

Not what we expected. Not what we wanted. Not what we needed. But look at what we got! I'm not sure what I think, and feel about it. This year was not on my radar, any more than yours. It has been disappointing in many ways. And yet amazing in others. It has been painful. And yet I have seen joy abound. I do not get it. And I do not believe I will. When we ask God "why" ... I don't think we will understand the answer.

Most of our lives we have lived on this planet earth with being fully oblivious to the fact that it is always spinning. Spinning ... around the sun – every 365 days. Spinning ... around its planet axis – 24 hours a day. It is spinning inside of spinning and I've been oblivious to that fact. Not even getting dizzy (most days 😊).

Anybody remember the old "tea cup" ride at the carnival? The ride went around in a circle ... every three or four tea cups was on another platform that went around in a circle ... and every tea cup where 3 or 4 of us would sit, well we could "on our own" spin them as fast as we could manage. It was one of the most simple, least spectacular rides at the carnival. I was told that along with "high swing" ride (the one where your feet dangle as you go in circles high in the air), the "tea cup" ride were the two most likely rides people would get sick on. Not the roller coasters, not the Ferris wheel, not the ones that spun so fast that it plastered you to the wall of the ride, but the swing and tea cups were the rides least desired to work (you can guess why).

This year, we have been spinning ... and we know it. We are sick of it. We have been sick in it. And we do not know how to get off this ride. And that worries us.

We are not the first ones to get on this ride. Let us leave our little "whoa is me" party and reflect on what happened 2,000 plus years ago. The event we call Christmas. Most years, we think Christmas sets us off ... spinning, not knowing which way we are

going. But let us realize that we have domesticated this event. We have tamed it down ... made it cute ... we look forward to it.

But what about "the" story? What God has done? We know the story ... but do we really know the story?

Mary? To say her world was spinning is an understatement. Whether we understand her virginity meaning – before she was able to have children or before she had sexual relations – this is an impossible birth. And God ... is going to be the father. Who is going to understand that one?



Joseph? He paid his dowry. His marriage was arranged. His life was getting settled. Now he was going to be a daddy, even before he actually was a daddy. And he, like Mary, had some weird understanding that this was God's doing.

We often talk about Mary and Joseph in this context. But what about the shepherds and angels? I think the Lights were too bright (like a camera flash) and all they could see were the "light" spots in their eyes. The shepherds could only say what the angels told them to say ... they didn't understand. The angels could only say what God told them to say ... they didn't understand. They are still talking about it.

Their world(s) were spinning ... and spinning ever since. We still struggle to get a handle on what God has done ... by becoming like us ... living with us ... dying for us. We know that God loves us ... but do we really know how much?

It makes my heart and my head hurt, literally and figuratively hurt, thinking about it sometimes. And I don't understand it, at least not most of it. But what I do know, is that I'm not letting go. I'm not getting off this ride with God. I know enough to know, I'm going to hold on tight ... for everything I'm worth ... with God alongside ... and letting God help me every way possible along the way.

I'm going to have to get used to being dizzy ... again.

Have a Blessed Christmas ... again!

Have a blessed New Year ... again!

And hold unto the One who is our Rock and Light!

Wanderings and Wonderings,

Pastor Bill Peters



earth with being fully oblivious to the fact that it is always spinning. Spinning ... around



