

December 30, 2018 – January 5, 2019
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7 Words for Christmas 2018-2019

Sunday, December 30, 2018

PATIENCE

Text: Ephesians 4:1-3

“I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

Be patient! That sure is easy for me to say! We tell each other to “relax and wait.” We say, be patient with the job, with the family, with our health---even to be patient with our favorite sport teams. The truth is that while patience may be a virtue, it is, as we all know, in very short supply.

As we come to the end of this 2018, and as we lean into the new year, we are all longing for something new in our lives. We want renewal, something refreshing, something exciting. Boy, it is hard to be patient for God’s Spirit to renew and make us new. We want God to hurry up.

That is my prayer for you today on this penultimate day of 2018. May you have patience. May each and every day bring you closer to what God wants for you. As you wait for that special greeting from a family member or friend at this yearend, or as you anticipate a diagnosis of disease or of healing know that God stands with you. Please know that God so loves you that he gives you the gift of faith and that your faith will allow you to be patient.

Pray with me: “You, O God, are so patient with us. Thank you, Lord for your patience with our concerns and troubles, our sins and failures. Continue to help us in these days to be patient with each other and to depend upon you. In the name of Jesus. Amen.”



Monday, December 31, 2018

EXPECTATION

Text: Jeremiah 29:11

“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for good and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.”

I have high expectations! I want the best for everybody in every situation. I want my family and friends to be a success. I want the congregation to which we belong to prosper. I want the Green Bay Packers to win every game, my favorite politicians to win every election, my stocks and bonds to all make money! But wait...This is not how life works. My sinful selfish expectations get in the way, and on this last day of 2018, I am relieved to know that I am not in charge of everything. I have expectations yet—I know the power of sin and failure. As a Lutheran, I understand the power of sin and how that sinfulness can destroy. As Christians we believe that our expectation should not be in our own ability. I expect God to prevail. My expectation is in God who has borne our sins and carried our sorrows.

Only hours are now left in this year. Tonight we kiss 2018 goodbye and welcome the New Year. We should have high expectations, high hopes for the next twelve months that come our way. But today I tell you this, while I have dreams for a lot of people and in a number of situations—my expectation is not in myself. I expect life forever with all who have gone before me. I expect joy in God’s presence. My expectation is in Christ the Lord. That is why I can say, “Happy New Year!”

Pray with me: *“I am expecting big things, God. Life, hope, future, eternity are all promised to us! We thank you, God, that you have given us this year now passing and we await with high expectations what grace upon grace you will provide in 2019. In the name of Jesus. Amen.”*



Tuesday, January 1, 2019

DETERMINATION

Text: I Corinthians 2:2

“For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.”

Both of my parents were smart. Besides brains my dad and mom had warm personalities. People enjoyed being around them. They had intellectual and social gifts but one thing they did not have was a formal education. People have told me that my father was great with horses and was very smart about his work as a farmer. I know my mother “skipped” the 8th and 10th grade because she was so advanced from her classmates. Yet both of them would never graduate from high school. The economic depression of the 1930’s caught them in its trap and both my folks would go to work to help their families survive. Yet they were determined people! I tell you this because it is a reminder how important determination is in our lives. I can still recall my mother

telling me and my sister that we must get as much education as we can if we were to be successful. She was determined that her children would make it in life!

It is the first day of a new year. What are you determined to accomplish this year? What will you do this year? What are you absolutely determined to create or finish in these twelve months called 2019? St. Paul would invite your determination, your eagerness, your doggedness to cling to Jesus Christ. He invites us to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

It is a daily joy to launch ourselves into the arms of Jesus. It is such a vale to know this Lord. In the midst of our pursuit of the treasures of this world (career, status, education, money) Jesus invites us to know him and to love him. Ah—a great way to begin the year!

Pray with me: *“You, O God, have allowed me to live another day and have placed me into this New Year. Kindle my determination to live in your grace, encourage all that is Godly and place within me a passion and desire for life forever with you. Help me to know you dear Jesus. Amen.”*



Wednesday, January 2, 2019

HONORING

Text: Romans 12:10

“Be devoted to one another with mutual love, showing eagerness in honoring one another.”

Talk about an old fashion expression! What does it mean today to honor one another? And especially the way St. Paul writes of it in his letter to the Romans by showing eagerness in honoring one another. A value of the Christian faith is to honor all people. As Christian people we should be about the business of honoring all people—and to be eager about it!

Who have you honored lately? Who have you recognized as the important person they are? Who have you remembered to God as a person whose life is important and meaningful and precious?

Here is my list for today the 2nd of January 2019:

I honor and give thanks for the two guys who work for the Refuse Disposal Company who will come past our house this morning and pick up the garbage. I honor the retired pastors who I have come to know over these years that have completed their employed ministry and still find ways to serve. I honor the governors of the states who are in the midst of finishing their elected terms (including my friend Scott Walker.) I honor the waitress at the local diner who has a pot of coffee in one hand and my lunch order in the other. I honor with eagerness the church organists who today will practice in a cold church building as they prepare for Sunday. And I honor the

grandson of my next door neighbor who will stop by his grandma's house to push snow and make her sidewalk clear and safe.

As Christian women and men we are able to see all people in all circumstances of life as precious and important. Who is on your honor list today?

Pray with me: *“Thank you Lord for putting so many persons into my life. Help me God to afford them dignity, to lift them up and to honor their work and life. For you, Jesus, are the one who showed the highest and greatest dignity to all persons and to all creation by stretching yourself out on the cross for all humanity. Thank you, Lord for life! Amen.”*



Thursday, January 3, 2019

JOY

Text: John 17:13

“Now I am coming to you, and to these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves.”

I am looking for joy! Give me some joy! Where can I get some joy? On an outside wall of a tavern in the town I live in is a sign that says in neon lights, “We Sell Happiness!” Really. Is that what they sell there—along with “Joy” too I wager. You can't really order up joy. It is not on a menu. Amazon might have books about joy or decorations that have joy written on them. But they do not deliver joy through the US Mail or by UPS. Joy might be someone's name (my beautiful granddaughter has Joy for a middle name) and the Christmas cards that you received this season invite you to have lots of joy! So what is this joy and where is it?

Joy is not a commodity and it is not for sale. We cannot buy or sell it. On these last days of Christmas as we put the decorations back in the box and as we haul the Christmas trees back into the basement or throw them on the curb we ask ourselves, “From where does joy come?” Or more accurately, “To whom is joy connected?” And that is the point. Joy is connected to a person. And His name is Jesus. The joy of knowing God and living in his presence is a part of the Christian life. When we were baptized, we received the Holy Spirit and that Spirit pointed to Jesus as Savior of the world.

Joy is the quiet confidence that we are loved, and that at the last day we will live with God forever. Joy is the confidence that we are a part of God's Kingdom. Joy is a gift that we receive.

Pray with me: *For the joy of God's Presence, the joy of hope for eternity, the joy of being surrounded by those we love and for the joy of living lives of service and meaning, we thank you O God. Make us carriers of your joy into this world. In the name of Jesus. Amen.*



Friday, January 4, 2019

Forgiveness

Text: Colossians 3:13

“Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.”

For many, today is a sad day! It is the day that the “New Year’s Resolutions” begin to collapse. I can hear the sound of collapsing “New Year’s Resolutions” all around the world! Yes—mine are falling apart too! Even the best intended plans to lose weight or to save money or to treat somebody better get caught up in life’s reality. Our sinful self sabotages our plan for a twenty-pound weight loss or a healthy savings account. For on this day or soon in an early day to come we realize that we cannot get much done without being confronted with temptation and failure. And we learn that God’s presence is needed!

Good! Better to learn that truth early in the year and get that out of the way! The hard reality of life is —“We cannot make it on our own.” We keep fighting our own pride. We keep thinking we can by our own best efforts accomplish great things on our own. But that vain effort to get anything really important done soon fails. We keep getting in the way of ourselves—and our best efforts are reduced to nice intentions but very little results.

The good news is that we are forced into the arms of the forgiving loving Jesus. Jesus has set the example for us. He has forgiven us—loved us on the cross—and gave us the promise of forgiveness and life with him. And now he calls us to love him by loving others. Can we forgive others on our own? Can we by our own efforts make things right with those who have hurt us? No. Not without God’s love—not without God’s help. Not without the life, death and resurrection of Jesus is forgiveness possible.

Pray with me: “I get it, Lord! I try hard but only in you can I be forgiven. I can’t earn it or be worthy of it but only receive it because of your work in me. Thank you, Lord for forgiveness! Amen.”



Saturday, January 5, 2019

PEACE

Text: Romans 15:33

“The God of peace be with you all. Amen.”

It's about over. The Christmas season officially ends tonight. Our American culture has been through with Christmas days ago. The advertisers have moved on to the next merchandisable holiday. In the Church we talk about the "Twelve Days of Christmas," and today is that last twelfth day. There are many wonderful traditions that have been handed down to us over the centuries. Gift giving, whether it be on Christmas Eve, Christmas Day or parceled out over the twelve days of the Christmas season is one such tradition. There is something magnificent about children and their parents and grandparents opening gifts and thanking one another to celebrate the birth of Jesus.

A gift we would all want but cannot receive wrapped in a bow or placed under a tree is the gift of peace. It is sought after today in the Mideast, in Iraq and Afghanistan, in Yemen and in Central Africa. Peace is sought on our national borders and within the halls of Congress. Peace is yearned for in our families and within our communities.

My prayer for you today is "peace." And that peace is attached to the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus promises to you peace that only he can give. We are looking for more than a "truce" between warring powers. We are counting on God in Jesus to bring the peace that last forever, the peace that makes whole, all that has been torn apart and the peace that is connected directly to reconciliation made possible through Jesus our Lord.

Pray with me: *"In the middle of the day, in the midst of the night, when our lives seem comfortable and when they seem lonely send us, Lord, your peace. In the midst of a world that is at war with itself, confused and in pain, please O God, send us the balm that is your peace. As Christmas becomes Epiphany and winter turns to spring, send us the only peace that you can give-peace forever in you. We love you and trust you O Lord, our God and peacemaker. Amen."*

