

NEW YEAR'S EVE - 1971

Redeemer Lutheran Church - Milwaukee

"BE FRUITFUL LOVERS IN '72"

Ecclesiastes 2:11 ++++ Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had spent in doing it, and behold, all was vanity (here meaning "transitory") and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.

The writer of Ecclesiastes has often been characterized as "a superficial cynic, peevishly asking, 'Is life worth living?'" Characterized as a man of many minds, but of one purpose, namely, "to find what to do with life." As a man struggling to find himself in a baffling, perplexing world. As one who believed a bundle of contradictions. As a gloomy, but honest servant of God searching for life's meaning and significance in the midst of its chaos.

So it is easy to understand why this writer, who had known greatness and honor, wisdom and wealth, success and hard work, why he pessimistically proclaimed: Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had spent in doing it, and behold, all was transitory and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.

The sun was setting on his life, and even after all of his success, his accomplishments, his wealth and hard work, he was yet searching for the real significance to be found in life.

The sun has set on nineteen-hundred and seventy-one, and like him, you and I might also at this moment be searching for the real meaning and significance of the transitory toils and events of "seventy-one." How everlasting will its successes and failures be? How eternal its accomplishments? How penetrating its suffering and sorrow? How permanent its peace and war, its prosperity and poverty, its hope and despair

Our responses to these questions ~~are~~<sup>will be</sup> the echoes of a thousand different tongues -- for none of us can respond to these exactly like his brother. And yet, ultimately,

whether tomorrow or fifty years hence, each of us will reach the same conclusion regarding the accumulation of events and toils and possessions of "seventy-one:" they are all transitory and a striving after the wind.

That is not to say that they are worthless NOW. God forbid such pious allusions. It is only to say that what we possessed in seventy-one, will not be possessed eternally. This Christian proclamation demands attention not only at the end of each year, but at every moment in which we find ourselves possessed by our own greatness, our own accumulations, our own intelligence, our own success or failure, hard work, suffering or sorrow! For all of these possessions CAN BECOME striving after the wind, if they become our eternal ends in life.

So our writer of Ecclesiastes is not so kooky after all. For all of us have or will confront his search for life's meaning and significance at sometime. And as we awaken, like him, to the fleeting-departing nature of life, we also will be driven to ask: What have I done with my life to give it eternal worth? What can I salvage from my life's accumulations to give that life eternal significance? How have I made seventy-one and how will I make seventy-two more than a striving after the wind? How can I live with the transitory nature of life, and still feel myself to be a fruitful creature?

You need not do, make or salvage anything from those transitory moments. You need not remain in the darkness with the writer of Ecclesiastes, either. For these questions have been eternally answered for you. You need only accept the answer if you are seeking eternal significance for your life. For the answer has been revealed by God. And it is more than an intellectual abstraction. His answer is in human form and has been given human action. His answer was experienced and still is experienced as the love of Christ.

That love is more than an intellectual abstraction. It is more than a sweet and quiet Christmas child. It is more than the passing wind.

It is a love which obeys an eternal God.

a love which accepts pain and persecution;

a love which forgives when tempted to destroy or avenge;

a love which chooses peace over increased bombing;

a love which binds, rather than divides;

a love which sacrifices even when that means failure;

a love which is colorblind;

a love which even breaks the rules of dogma and

order when those rules have enslaved their

followers to them, rather than to their God;

yes, a love which is for all brothers, because it abides

in God's light, and there is no stumbling in that light.

That light of love is eternally shining, and it will not succumb to the transitory events or possessions of life.

So, what have I, what have you done with your life to give it eternal significance in 1971? Have you and I accepted the fruitfulness of an eternal gift offered? We want a criterion for the significance of our lives in seventy-one: How many lives did you and I fill with His love last year??? That's our criterion. That is the most accurate scale with which we have to weigh the eternal fruitfulness of our lives during seventy-one or an y year.

TO LIVE FOR MORE THAN STRIVING AFTER WIND -- YES,  
TO LIVE ETERNALLY, IS TO DAILY AWAKEN TO AN EVER  
NEW AND GREATER WONDER AT GOD'S LOVE, AND THEN  
TO POUR OUT THAT WONDER TO ALL THE WORLD THAT  
WE TOUCH.

How many of God's children have you touched with His wonder during seventy-one? Through you, was your whole family touched with His love? Or were you too busy with your own accumulations and successes? Did you get beyond the family last year? How far did you risk God's love?

Did you try to share it with someone you had previously found unacceptable? Unlovable? With someone who smelled bad? With someone who drank too much? With someone dying or in prison? With someone of a different status or race? WERE YOU WALKING IN HIS LIGHT OR STUMBLING IN THE DARKNESS IN SEVENTY-ONE?? Your answer and mine to these questions will tell us how eternally fruitful and significant our lives have been during the 365 days just past.

But regardless of those past days, our presence here tonight proclaims that we desire to make the days of seventy-two that much more significant! For God has called us here, and we have responded. He has planted us as trees in his garden. Through His love in Christ, he has done everything to make it possible for us to bear good and enduring fruit. We are the branches who will bear this most fruitful love in 1972.

Hopefully, the successes, the accomplishments, the prosperity of 1972 will ripen His love in us so that we will share it with all those we touch and see. But similarly, let us pray that the struggles, the failures, the suffering, and the sorrow of seventy-two will also teach us to patiently bear His fruitful love. For if we can bear His love even when pressed down with trouble, then we will surely enter the lives of our fellow brothers and sisters and bring them God's peace in the midst of their trials.

God only knows that this kind of love badly needs to be shared with a fearful and perplexed and chaotic world. For too many in this world are without an eternal foundation-- they are drifting with the passing wind. They need to be implanted in God's soil -- and for them, we must be the cultivators and fertilizers of His love.

If the new year before us brings us one step closer to a separated, sick, imprisoned, or lonely brother so that his sorrows and joys become our sorrows and joys, and our joy and peace in God become his, then seventy-two will have

become less TRANSITORY, and MUCH MORE FRUITFUL. Seventy-two will then be a year in which the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining more brightly. Seventy-two will then be a more eternally significant year.

As we share the eternal fruitfulness of Christ's loving presence in this Eucharist, let us make that loving presence our fruitful resolution for life together in seventy-two.

Amen.

NEW YEAR'S EVE

Lutheran Church of the Master - Troy  
December 31, 1974 - 6:30 p.m.

"A TIME TO LOOK AHEAD"

"I do not claim that I have already succeeded or have already become perfect. . . . the one thing I do, however, is to forget what is behind me and do my best to reach what is ahead."  
Philippians 3:12,13

If ever there was anyone who had every reason to LOOK BACK on the past with regret, it was the Apostle Paul. In his letter to the Church at Corinth, he states - "For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God."

He remembered so clearly how diligently he pursued what he believed to be the will of God - how he led people away to be put to death, because they named the name of Christ.

Imagine ~~the past of Paul's life~~ <sup>had the consequences</sup> if that binge of persecution plagued ~~Paul's~~ <sup>Paul's</sup> conscience for the rest of his life!?! If he had allowed HIS PAST to determine HIS FUTURE - we would have never known Paul as the greatest missionary of the Christian Church. He would have been recorded as a ruthless murderer.

The saving factor in his life was the RECOGNITION and ACCEPTANCE of the grace of God in Jesus Christ. There was no way that he could make up for the immorality of his violence -- no way that he could redeem himself -- HE WAS A BLOODY MURDERER -- only through God's gift of grace could Paul look anew at life -- at the worth of his own life.

So in his letter to the Church at Philippi, he says - THE ONE THING I DO IS TO FORGET WHAT IS BEHIND ME and DO MY BEST TO REACH WHAT IS AHEAD."

The Calendar tells us that we have come to the end of another year. A great deal of emphasis is placed on "looking back" and making New Year's resolutions designed to help us to correct the mistakes of the past. Or maybe in other cases simply looking back drooling over the year's successes.

But ~~in being~~ <sup>in being</sup> all honest with ourselves - if we look back, we soon realize we're all failures. Not one of us has really lived up to what we expect of ourselves -- to say nothing of what others expect of us -- and we all know we're far removed from what God hopes for us -- so that leaves all of us with a judgment of FAILURE.

As I look at the month of December, alone, I stand aghast at what a failure I have been -- according to my own standards, to say nothing of God's or yours. The sideshows of Christmas busyness and preparations for special services (including tonites) have made home visitations nigh UN-EXISTENT. I'm sure you can isolate similar FAILURES for yourselves.

But - dare we let our lives be controlled by our failures?!? Dare we always be looking back? Can there be any value in dangling yesterday's garbage at nose's end?

The Christian Gospel answers: DESTROY THE GARBAGE BEFORE IT CHOKES YOU TO DEATH! Or as Paul says, Forget what is behind you, and do your best to reach what is ahead.

And God's grace, through Christ enables us to do just that. No, we can't claim that we have already succeeded or become perfect. But we can claim AN END TO YESTERDAY without dragging its garbage into our tomorrows. Christ makes this claim possible -- not through a system of merit badges - or degrees - or stripes - or promotions -- or resolutions. But through God's system of grace - we are freed from the guilt of yesterday's failures and the egotism of yesterday's successes.

And so - the Christian enters 1975 with a clean slate -- no need for resolutions -- no need for guilt -- just a need to be thankful that he is still loved and that he can set the same goal for himself.

Yes - simply a time to look ahead with God's goal in mind.

We - of the Master - need to hear the impact of this message. For in the seven months I have been here - I have too often heard people saying, "look back" in order to see ahead. Still other times I have seen us looking back at yesterday's mistakes IN ORDER TO LUG THEM WITH US INTO THE FUTURE. My friends, much like Paul -- that's just too heavy a load to carry into tomorrow.

*ALREADY* Obviously, we have NOT *already* succeeded - nor have we become perfect. But the goal of God's love will never stand a chance IF WE CAN ONLY LOOK BEHIND at yesterday's shortcomings. *Successes.*

We begin 1975 with the gift of God's grace -- a love which frees us from fears - from guilts - from egotisms - from the unfulfillments of what's behind us. All we've got to carry with us into 1975 is God's goal for our lives -- ~~his example in Jesus Christ.~~

*To be like Christ.*

We believe there can be no greater human asset than the life of Christ -- his love forgives, renews, heals, breaks down barriers, and unites us even when we disagree politically, economically, or otherwise.

Yes, we rally around the name of Jesus - which means, "God saves." His way is our way NOT ONLY for the beginning of a New Year - but for every da

Not because his way is an easy way -- it's a tough way because it means dying to our idols and egotisms of the past. But it's our way, because we can FORGET WHAT IS BEHIND US, AND DO OUR BEST TO REACH WHAT IS AHEAD -- the goal of peace & harmony accomplished ONLY thru God's love.  
Amen.



FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS - NEW YEAR'S DAY

Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo

January 1, 1995

Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

**"NAME IT & CLAIM IT IN '95!"**

"And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, ...  
And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man."

Luke 2:21,52

All over the world within the past 24 hours or so, people have been celebrating the arrival of 1995. In many cases, the celebration has been a raucous one ... marked by rowdy parties, noisemakers, mobs, alcohol consumption and other mood-altering jirations. We human beings live with time all the time, but for some reason, when that last digit rolls over in the calendar to mark the end of the old and beginning of the new, we feel compelled to, literally, "lose our cool." Have any of you ever wondered why we take on "this party spirit" on Dec. 31st? Many experts say that the ending of a year distantly reminds us of the end of our personal lives. Time is running out and ticking down for all of us. And, lo and behold, Dec. 31st comes and Jan. 1st follows on its heels, and "wella" - WE CELEBRATE BECAUSE WE MADE IT TO A NEW YEAR! With New Year's Day we get a reprieve - the old year dies, but we do not.

And this is not only true for Americans. Each of the world's many cultures observes this coming into a new year. The earliest known record of a New Year's festival can be traced to Mesopotamia in 2000 BC. Like our own culture, many societies see the new year as an opportunity to "take stock." Businesses take inventory and "close out" financial records. Publishers uplift the "worst" and the "best dressed" of the previous year; or like *Time* magazine, announce the Man of the Year. Politicians go to their districts and assess their achievements and set goals of better representation for the new year (or at least Tim Greenwood does). In some places, houses are cleaned; gifts are exchanged; breaches in relationships are reconciled. **This atmosphere of a "new year" inspires many to make decisions which will improve their quality of life.** I'm told that Weight Watches and Nutri System have their biggest months in January: which reminds us of the church bulletin that read: "Weight Watchers will meet on Tuesday at 7 p.m. in the parlor. Please use the large double-door side entrance." Or the man who went to his doctor for new year advice and was told to "try running in place." The man asked, "In place of what?"

For Christians, the coming of a new year offers the same opportunity for renewal or improvement in quality of life. The difference between a sacred year and a wasted year will be determined how we occupy our time. So in light of today's texts, maybe we should address the question put forth by one of today's commentators on the lessons: "It's the same old world, but is it the same old us?"

Is it BC or AD for us?" In other words, has Christ's coming into our world made any real difference in the way we will be occupying our time in '95? Our gospel today compels us to make **resolutions** for this New Year from God's point of view rather than only our own! First, the gospel asks: What difference has this name, "Jesus" made in our lives? And second, have we claimed the power and meaning of that name as our most crucial commitment of faith for 1995 and beyond? Or said more simply, God's resolution is: **Name it (the faith) & Claim it in '95!** Now, what does that really mean?

The first part of today's gospel recalls the circumcision and naming of Jesus. This name is the same name that is forever cast on your forehead and mine. When we were baptized, the pastor said: "Peter, child of God, you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Jesus Christ forever!" The way we spell the name of Jesus on our foreheads is by marking it as a sign of the cross. Once we are marked with that cross, it says: "Jesus, is my Savior!" That's the meaning of the name "Jesus:" the one who saves. Once baptized, every Christian is **identified with the power of saving** ... "saving" here meaning to restore, to forgive, to reconcile and to harmonize life.

But just like the people of Israel, Jesus's name dries up on our foreheads and we forget "whose we are." Like the Israelites, we continually break the covenant. **Instead of uplifting the name of Jesus, we try to make a name for ourselves.** So, God had to make a new deal with Israel ... a new promise with them and with us. A child was born to be an everlasting sign of God's loving presence. And God commands that every person who believes in Him should have that child's name on his/her forehead.

So, you and I carry the name of Jesus on our forehead. And that name is spelled with a cross. And every person in the world will come to know the name of Jesus through us - because we are the carriers of his name. The name can't be seen on our foreheads, but it will be seen through our actions.

Barbara Lunblad, ELCA pastor, tells the story of Gay Pride Day in Grand Rapids, MI. Some gay people had gathered in an auditorium to hear a pastor from Metro Community Church. But a large group of "religious" people were jeering: "Hey you sinners! Repent and be saved of your sick and evil ways!" These protesters got louder and angrier, waving their bibles at the gay people. The pastor invited the gay people to move forward, and then they turned around and said: "Jesus loves us and Jesus loves you!" Over and over the gay people repeated this message: "Jesus loves us and Jesus loves you".

The protesters then went into a rage, jumping on the tables and screaming: "Jesus hates you! Jesus hates you!" This went on for several minutes. Lunblad said she had never seen such hatred; people were actually fearing for their lives.

But what was most sorrowful was that the name of Jesus had been violently taken in vain. That day - hundreds in that room heard the name of Jesus attached to human violence and condemnation. And many left that place believing that Jesus' name stands for hatred and condemnation.

That's not God's resolution for His name; that's human brokenness of His name. On this first day of 1995, God again resolves to make things new ... and that begins with the proper use of His name. I ask you right now to repeat after me: IN 1995, I RESOLVE TO USE THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST AS A POWER TO UPLIFT, TO FORGIVE AND TO LOVE OTHERS ... NOT AS AN EXPRESSION OF MY OWN VAIN ANGER OR FRUSTRATION.

Thank You! Now that we have "Named It" properly -- that only means that each of us must now "Claim It" appropriately in 1995. The second portion of today's gospel story illustrates the process of claiming what we have been named. We're told that "Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor." In other words, Jesus became different from what he was when he was first named. He couldn't "suck the milk of Bethlehem" forever; the time came for him "to chew the meat of Calvary."

To put it bluntly, there's not much of a challenge for any of us in "Naming the Name of Jesus;" but it's something else to "live the purpose of that Name." God resolves that his children (like your children and mine) are to grow up so that they not only name His name but claim His name: **THEY LIVE HIS PURPOSE.** We all teach our our children, above all, to continue to give respect and integrity to our family name. We ask our children **to claim the family name!**

A story told by Neil Kurshan graphically illustrates the difference between just "naming" and "claiming." A medical student went to a counselor to see if she should complete or drop out of med school to raise her family. The counselor advised her that she could do both with a little help. But the student said "she could never allow her children to be raised by a housekeeper." When the counselor questioned this, the med student told how she came from a wealthy family and had been raised by a nanny. Her parents often took extended trips abroad. One spring the nanny suddenly quit. Her parents were really upset because their vacation plans had been jeopardized. But a few days before their trip, they hired a new housekeeper. Then the day before their departure, the daughter noticed her mother wrapping up all the family silverware & jewels. She said, "Mom, why are you doing that?" Her mother answered: "I can't trust this new nanny with these family valuables." That insensitive remark had stabbed this young girl for a lifetime. The knives, forks and rings were considered greater "family valuables" than this daughter." She vowed from that day that she would never allow her children to be raised by a nanny.

It is so easy to name the Name of Jesus. But are we resolved to claim that name so that we live his purpose: namely, **THAT ABOVE ALL, WE DO ALL IN OUR POWER TO CLAIM AND REVEAL THAT NAME OF LOVE ... NOT MERELY NAME IT, AND THEN WORSHIP ABOVE ALL THE ACQUISITION OF THINGS!**

God has resolved to love us more than any other thing on earth. That resolution was made crystal clear on Calvary. In gratitude for his everlasting resolution, let us at least resolve in 1995 **TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER MORE THAN WE LOVE THE STUFF OF THIS WORLD: "In 1995, O Lord, I will do my very best to love my children and your family of faith more than the toys and other trinkets that seek to possess me!"**

So, dear friends, as God has Named You and Claimed You for his own thru all eternity -- on this first day of 1995, you have made the most important resolution of '95 or any other time: **TO NAME HIM AND CLAIM HIS LOVE** above all other things! Be assured, if you and I do our very best to fulfill those two simple resolutions ... '95 will be one of the most blessed years of our lives. **Happy New Year!**

AMEN.