

Weekly Sermon

Where to Hang Our Hopes for the New Year

Sermon Psalm 8 Ecclesiastes 3:1-14 Colossians 3:12-17 Dec. 31, 2006

Where to Hang our Hopes for the New Year -

If I were to give a simple answer to that implied question - it would be - most simply - that we can begin again. It's almost the New Year ... and ... that means we can - in a sense - begin again.

What hope that can offer. No matter how you measure 2006 - it has not been the Happiest or holiest of years for the human race. No year that ends with a world awaited hanging can be. And even though 2006 began with a Sunday, Jan. 1, and ends with the Sunday - Dec. 31 - The Lord's days, going in and going out - We still can hang our hopes most - not on the past - but on the future.

That's the wonder of the gift of every tomorrow - and especially a tomorrow that is the First day of a new year - the first day of the rest of our lives. It is a blank page as yet unwritten upon. It is like a field of freshly fallen snow - unmarked - waiting for us to leave new footprints... The gift of a New year awaits - the hope of a fresh new start in the way we live - For each of us... for all of us... for this old world.

Let us pray.

Our God our help in ages past, our hope for years to come, on the brink of a new year - help us to hear the old old word - with new understanding - and new commitment to walk in its way and truth and light. In Christ. Amen.

To be sure - tomorrow is our doing and not God's. We fix the date. 2007. Yes it is the day that the Lord makes. But it has a lot more numbers to it than Jan. 1 2007. For many it won't be 2007 at all. Not for the Chinese, or the Mayan people in Mexico, or for Jewish people, or Muslims. All have their own calendars. And even our calendar is wrong - its supposed to be the year 2007 since our Lord Jesus' birth. But we know now that Jesus was born maybe in the year 4 B.C. - Jesus was born, yes, Before Christ.

And yet - for all that the date is not absolute - it's good, very good for us, to mark a New Year's day. To mark, as Ecclesiastes says, the times and seasons of life. We need time - to catch our breath - to look back, and learn from experience, And to look ahead in light of our experience with new goals, new aspirations, And, yes, New hope. Hope that we have learned enough from the past to pave the way to a better future. And that's the gift each new year's day offers ... again and again and again.

It is in the very name of the month to be - January - named for the Roman God with two faces - for looking in two directions at once. A bit of that is going on all around us today - newspapers, magazines, and radio and TV are filled to day with analysis of the past and prognostications for the future.

And that's okay. Even like the wise men of old - they had learned from the past - But they followed a star into an uncertain future. And if we are wise, we will look to learn from the past, and than be on with living into the new day. Looking to leave cleaner clearer straighter tracks in the new year than we did in the old.

That was in fact the Apostle Paul's advice to his fellow Christians. 'Forgetting what lies behind, I press on for the prize of the upward call of Christ....'

It is a new year of the Lord - and we can hang our hopes on that fact. We are about to step into that

fresh new field of snow - to make new tracks - And there is no lack of advice for us about what we ought to do.... From Dr. Phil, and Oprah herself, and every talk show host and political pundit on the loose, you can find tips for a totally awesome new year.... Weight loss, financial success, romantic excitement, and all - Requiring hardly any heavy lifting on your part at all.

And some of the advice is probably good - listen carefully.... For everything there is a season and a reason under heaven....

But I would suggest that we need something less - and something more - than all the advice available on New Year's eve - to make the most of the gift of this new year. I think we need most a simple word of truth ... that we can trust ... Something to guide and light and warm our lives in the new year - something as simple, and clear – as the symbol of the lighted candles we held here on Christmas eve - A simple clear light like truth that shines our way down the opening year.

And I think Paul puts the light in our hands... He gives us words that make a way, a highway for us ... He wrote words of high purpose - but he did not write blindly - He gave light - but he knew it was for walking in a dark world... He knew there were fears to be faced. The oldest of fears is ever near.... Will we even be here next year. Will we survive to be alive for another new year? Or those we love?

And in a troubled world, where people are starving still, and genocide goes on, and Americans die daily in distant places to protect our freedom to live ... Often all too wasteful lives ... Yes - there is some fear about the future...

Fear for the jobs we have is real - and fear for the whether we can rebuild The Detroit community - with a better economy, and greater unity across racial and ethnic and economic differences - is real. A little fear here at OLCC,P - can we really accomplish something as good and useful in ministry and mission, can we really share enough to build - and so build to share our faith with others for years and years to come..

Paul knew about the fear of the uncertain future. Set on his course to defend the faith he knew by wiping out followers of the executed Christ - he was blinded - side tracked. Left facing a future in the dark.... But Paul had the power, the light giving, darkness shattering, power of faith in God. A faith that could lead him to see more clearly God's will and to see a new and better way to live.. And Paul did... follow the light he saw in his darkness.

And Paul calls us to put our faith to work... too. To let us see better ways to live our lives. To let Our faith lead us out into life, into life in the new year coming... Put on then, Paul says, as God's chosen ones, compassion, and kindness, and patience. . Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts. Do everything in the name of Christ. Learn from the past - but face forward...

And what Paul said - and did in his own life - I once saw at work in the life of a blind person on a busy street corner. The street corner was not unlike the first day of a new year. All kinds of uncertain possibilities and dangers and risks and rewards lay ahead....

The blind person stood on the curb - white cane in hand - needing to cross the busy intersection - needing to step into the busy rush of life.... And I was captivated by the scene - as I watched the person do it. With only the cane and great faith - the person stepped off the curb into the street. Stepping past whatever fears the person had - that might hold the person back - The blind person stepped forward... in faith.

And that blind person has been a symbol for me of all that Paul says in Colossians... Of the faith we need and have to begin again in hope ... life in a new year. I saw three things in the faith of that blind person... I heard three things in the words of Paul.... Three things I would share for our new journey

into 2007. Trust - Study - Walk

Trust God - Study God's Truth - Walk in God's Ways. Paul said all this .. the Blind Person knew it...

First - we are God's people. Creatures of a loving caring saving God, who came to us in Christ, who gives us every new day, and every new year, and is with us in the struggles of life. We live best - every new minute, hour, day, week or year - when we trust God. It is as simple as those 10 best ways to live - God gives... What more rules - or less - would serve us better? God knows our need - And has provided... This is the day the Lord has made - for you. On the edge of a curb - or a new Year - Trust. The God who made you and made me a little less than Angels – God's own beloved.

Second - even for the blind person - it was not blind faith. It was a faith, a trust, learned and tried and tested. That person had stepped off curbs often before - had learned to listen and sense when to step. And that's Paul's word to us - 'Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly
Read, Study, Discuss, Learn. Come to know all that you can of God's love for you, and the new year will go better for you. Study - Jesus' disciples called him Rabbi - Teacher - for a reason. How to begin a new year? -

Trust the God who gave God's self to you... Worship God. And study God's word to you and for you.

And third - if you know something about the truth in life - do something about it. Trust God - Know all you can know - and then - step off the curb. Paul said - what ever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus! Live for the highest and best. In a sad way - we often fail to make the best of life, because we fail to live for the Best... for the most vital and lasting values in life.

Sometimes, too often, things become the measure of life, instead of Life determining the place and value of things. Christmas is a good reminder of what we will value most in the new year. I was a bit stunned at the toys - the number and complexity of the toys my grand children have. Astounding. I was having a kind of second childhood trying to play with their toys.

But I was also concerned how often the toys fostered the situation of one child absorbed in what he or she was doing - with less interaction between children. The toys created a kind of isolation.

And I was pleased - when the children welcomed playing some of the older games together... and with me. And.. in truth... I was exhausted a bit exhausted by it, too. The floor is a long way down and up But I was thrilled to see human beings interacting with, teaching and learning from each other.

And there were moments – lots of moments - for teaching - for pointing out some of the central concepts of a Christian life... Kindness, Patience, Forgiveness, Sharing and Caring.... Something that I didn't see happening with remote controlled cars and computer games.

Trust in God -yes. Learn. about God's Will. And - do it. Do it... Live your faith.. and share it. Find and create and take advantage of situations where you can share the heart of your faith, or our faith in Jesus Christ and his way and truth and love.

Yes – in the every day activities – pay it forward – show kindness, patience, forgiveness, mercy and love – in every way you can. It is the heart of Paul's good advice - In whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Let your faith be visible...

It was sad note - from a strong member of the Church moved to another town - and after several months he wrote to his old pastor - Pastor, he said, not once since we moved has a new neighbor or work colleague, or casual contact, some we know active in their churches, ever invited us to attend

