

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
Sunday after New Year's, January 3, 2010

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Hymns: 110: 1-4, 112: 1-2, 111, 114, 52.

Lessons: Psalms 31, 1 Peter 1:22-25, Luke 13:1-9.

Text: Psalms 32:5, Psalms 107:1 (KJV), 2 Corinthians 1:3-7, Philippians 4:13.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

New Year's Eve has traditionally been a time of both looking back and looking forward. The world makes New Year's Eve a time of wild celebration and many overindulge in alcohol, dulling their senses. The Child of God makes New Year's Eve a time of penitently looking back and prayerfully looking forward. As we consider the end of one calendar year and the beginning of another, let us remember Hebrews 13:8: "*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.*" We look to Jesus Christ and to God's Word to find

WORDS FOR BRINGING IN THE NEW YEAR

- 1. Repentance**
- 2. Thanksgiving**
- 3. Comfort**
- 4. Resolution**

Let's start with the word Repentance. "*I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD'-- and you forgave the guilt of my sin.*" Psalms 32:1-5.

As we look backward at 2009 as well as at our entire lives, we admit we are sinners. God's Law, summarized by the Ten Commandments, shows us what we have NOT done. It also tells us the evil things we HAVE done that God forbids. When we sincerely confess our sins, we admit that we have sinned against God and against our fellow men – against one another – “in thought, word, and deed”. "*The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth;*" Genesis 8:21, King James Version. "*Every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood.*" New International Version. "*Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.*" Psalms 51:5. Not only are we inheritors of original sin from our parents going all the way back to Adam and Eve, the first human beings, we are guilty of committing sin upon sin against our Holy God, who has created us.

But our Holy God who has created us has done more for us. He has also redeemed us. He sent his Son Jesus Christ into this world to live a perfect life as a human being and then to be punished for the sins of all men – the innocent being punished for the guilty! Was it fair? No. Was it just? No. But it is what God wanted. "*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.*" John 3:16-18

What does it mean when we read in the Word of God that God has “redeemed” us? It means he has bought us back; he has paid the price to set us free. We are no longer the pawns of the devil. We are no longer slaves to the sinful world surrounding us. We are no longer slaves to our sinful flesh, the “old Adam” within us. It

means that God has forgiven our sins for Jesus' sake. God has told us in his word that He sent his Son, Jesus Christ, into the world to save the world through him. **"Whoever believes in him is not condemned."**

An important part of our worship services is the announcement of the forgiveness of sins. Scripture makes it clear that **"God exalted [Jesus Christ] to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins."** Acts 5:31. The minister pronounces those words, not because he is a good person, but because he has been called by the congregation to publicly announce that. But God has done more than just give us words. He has given us the sacrament of the Altar, the Lord's Supper. In receiving the bread and wine, you are truly receiving the body and blood of Jesus Christ as a sign, a seal, an assurance of the forgiveness of your sins. Those who have been instructed in the chief teachings of the Word of God were invited to come and receive, by faith, the body and blood of Jesus Christ FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF ALL YOUR SINS.

This is the same forgiveness which is announced to you in words. In something you can see, smell, and taste, that is, the bread and the wine, you also are assured of the forgiveness of your sins. Because your sins are forgiven, eternal life in heaven is your gift from God.

Our second word for bringing in the New Year is Thanksgiving. We read from Psalms 107:1: **"O give thanks unto the LORD, for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever."** You see the word "thanksgiving" in the sermon theme and parts. We celebrate a special day in November, but you surely give thanks to God every day. For your small children, that may be a simple table prayer, and for the tiniest children, it may be a mechanical thing to fold their hands and say something before they eat. Yet for anyone who can think about what has happened within the last year, there are many things to be thankful for. For all of this we are grateful and give thanks to God.

Our third word tonight is Comfort. **"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows. If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer. And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort."** 2 Corinthians 1:3-7.

What is comfort? It is making you feel better. It is making you realize that things will eventually turn out good. It is assurance that whatever happened in the past, God forgives your sins for Jesus sake. It is the realization that someone is watching over you and making sure that whatever happens will be for your blessings.

Where can you turn for comfort? Friends? Novels? Self-help books? Alcohol or other drugs? Advice columnists in the newspapers and magazines? What of this world can give lasting comfort?

What is the real source of comfort, the best source of comfort? I think you know. It is God. And he speaks to us in his Word. Surely those of you who have memorized any scripture passages at all know some of those words of God that give comfort. And of course, you can easily find more of those words of comfort that God offers to you. But you must make them your own. God wrote them down for you, too. How do you find such words of comfort? Well, you can randomly search the scriptures. You can methodically search the scriptures. And you can find some guides. One such guide is found on page 167 in the front of The Lutheran Hymnal. You will see there a list of Psalms "for comfort". And as you browse through those pages, or even read the Psalms for yourself, you will surely find other words of God that speak to your situation, whatever that may be on a given day. But do not give up. Turn to God for comfort

The words “Fear Not” and “Do not be afraid” are found in the Word of God almost 70 times, in books from Genesis to Revelation. It is most fitting that at the beginning of a new year we be reminded of what our God tells us so that we can be assured that our Lord God will be with us tonight, tomorrow, and forever. The Word of God clearly tells us: **“Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.”** Isaiah 43:1. And again: **“Do not be afraid, for I am with you.** Isaiah 43:5.

Every time we use the words our Lord Jesus taught us – the words we call The Lord’s Prayer – we are asking that God’s will be done. We are not demanding that our own wills be done. We are not insisting that things be done our way. We are asking “Thy will be done”. That means that we want what God wants for us. That may be happy or sad things. That may be pleasant things or unpleasant things. But no matter what happens, we have God’s assurance in Romans 8:28 **“that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”** But we, as God’s beloved children, really mean the words we say and thoughts we pray when we ask for the Will of God to be done in our lives.

Fear Not. Don’t be afraid. These were the words preceding the words of the angel to the shepherds, simple folks like us, on the evening Jesus Christ was born: **“Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.”** Luke 2:10.

Then there is a fourth word in our sermon outline. Resolution. **“I can do everything through him who gives me strength.”** Philippians 4:13.

“New Year’s Resolutions” have been very popular for a long time. People resolve when a new year begins to do things differently. They decide to be better, to do things better, to improve, to be kinder, to eat differently ... the list could go on and on. Now there is not necessarily anything wrong with making resolutions. In fact, when we use one form of confessing our sins, you make a resolution. That form of confession of sins asks “Do you promise that with the aid of the Holy Ghost, you will henceforth amend your sinful life? Then declare so by saying I do promise.” Amend means to change. That is a promise to change. But you were going a step further with that resolution to amend, to change your sinful life than any earthly resolution does. You are going to do it with the aid, with the help of the Holy Ghost. And, of course, you remember that the Holy Ghost, God, speaks to us through the Holy Scriptures, the Word of God. So that must be the source and the strength for any resolutions we may make.

Do we ever see ourselves as that fig tree in our gospel lesson? I think that we all WANT to bring forth good fruit in service to our God and to our fellow man. The Lord wants to see fruits of faith in us, too. But it is hard. We can’t do it by ourselves, but, as we read this text in the King James Version: **“I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.”** Philippians 4:13. Our strength comes from Christ, and from the Holy Ghost working in us.

As we close this sermon, we are abundantly thankful for what Our God has done for us all our lives. We have only praise for what he has done for us eternally. We rejoice that God has forgiven our sins for Jesus’ Sake. What assurances do we have? God says we need not fear: **“Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.”** Isaiah 43:1. And again: **“Do not be afraid, for I am with you.** Isaiah 43:5.

We are also encouraged by the words of the hymn writer:

"Fear not, I am with thee, Oh, be not dismayed,

For I am thy God And will still give thee aid;

I'll strengthen thee, Help thee, And cause thee to stand,

Upheld by My righteous, Omnipotent hand." Amen. (The Lutheran Hymnal, 427:3)