



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church
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December 31, 2009
New Year's Eve Worship
1 Peter 1:22-25
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Isaiah 51:1-6
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 90
Second Lesson: Luke 13:6-9

Check Your Expiration Date

It doesn't really happen all that often in our house anymore with the kids the ages that they are; a gallon of milk just doesn't last all that long in our house. It's there and it's gone and they're saying, "Where's more milk?" Usually if you open up our fridge, there are two or three gallons of milk in there and they are wondering why there aren't more. But I remember probably a month or two back, it's been awhile so I'm not sure exactly how long ago it was, but I remember Tim had some milk and said, "Does this taste funny to you?" It was some milk that got pushed back into the corner behind some stuff and didn't get noticed for awhile. Then they went to get it in the morning and it kind of sat in the back a little too long. Milk turns bad and it tastes kind of funny. At least it wasn't lumpy, but it still tasted kind of funny.

That's when you kind of notice that there are some things that are perishable. We live in a world that is filled with perishable things and they aren't just the things that are sold in grocery stores. As a matter of fact, you are sitting by a lot of things that are perishable, right?

We are perishable. We just sang about it in the hymn, "We think of dear ones Lord that have gone." The hymn we just sang mentioned it. We are perishable and we live in a world that is perishing. That's one of the truths that we see in Scripture. We are drawing closer and closer to the end of the world. It could be today. It could be thousands of years, but it's always coming closer. The world that we live in, and those who live in it, are perishing. That's why it's kind of interesting when our Lord says to us, "You've been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable seed." It kind of tells us that something has changed in us, right?

Wouldn't it be great if you could go to the grocery store and buy something and you just put a few drops into your milk and it doesn't perish? Or in all of your food? Just think of all the stuff you would never have to throw out if you could do something like that, but you can't. It's not going to happen. You can buy all the fancy food savers and vacuum out all the air you want, the stuff is still going to perish, right?

Our God tells us that has changed for us. We are now imperishable. Our expiration date has changed. So as we gather and mark the time passing as we mark another

Calendar year, we want to think about our expiration date. Think about how it's changed, and check it and see how we are living in light of that change in our expiration date.

It's a fascinating thing that God says to us through Peter here. "Now that you have purified yourself by obeying the truth;" well, God did all the purifying. We know that. He's the one that lived and died in our place. He took away all of our sins. But it's saying, "Now that you are believers." It's just his way of saying, "Now that you are believers. Now that you have Spirit-worked faith in your hearts, you are changed." That is the whole point he is making, right? You're changed. You're different. "You've been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable." You're imperishable. That's one of the changes.

But notice the one he speaks of directly and right away. It speaks to what God looks for in us, which is a constantly growing faith. When he says, "Now that you are believers, now that you have obeyed the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart," that's fruit of faith, right? There are plenty of people that you know that you don't like, but God is telling you to love every last one of them. That's not always easy. That person you work with that's annoying, like that commercial on ESPN Monday Night Football, the person with the laugh, the person with breath and all those things, the people that annoy you that you work with, how you make it through they say is because you have Monday Night Football coming. If that's all you have, good luck!

You and I have something more than that, right? We have a Lord who has changed our expiration date. He's telling us we are perishing in this world, but we're not perishing forever. We have this gift from our God that "even though we die, yet shall we live," as Jesus said. As we have been changed like this by our God, it changes how we live in relationship to one another. We are now called to love one another deeply, from the heart, not superficially, not fake, not a put-on show while behind our smile we're saying, "What a jerk." We are to love one another deeply, from the heart. That's not natural for you and me. It's natural for you and me to love those that have earned our love or deserved our love or who love us back, right? But to love that person that doesn't do any of those things? To love that person that gets under our skin and irritates us like a pebble in our shoe? That takes something outside of us. That takes a growing faith. That takes a faith that at this point is stronger than it was at this point last year.

As you come together and mark the passing of the calendar year, it's one of the things we ought to do. We ought to think to ourselves, "Am I walking closer to my God right now than I was at this time last year? Is my faith stronger?" The answer that our God gives us in how faith becomes stronger, he points out to us in these words from Peter also.

Our faith becomes stronger through what he speaks of as making us imperishable. We've been born again, this imperishable seed, through the living and enduring Word of God. Even though everything else around us is perishing, even our bodies are

perishing; the Word of God does not. Because that Word of God lives in us, this message that Jesus lived and died in our place and took away all of our sins, that means that we too will not perish. That's the Word that comes to us and strengthens us.

So if you want to get better at loving one another deeply, from the heart, the place to start is to spend more time with God's Word. It's not just for kids anymore. Just like milk isn't just for kids, God's Word isn't just for kids. It's for all of us. We all have a deep need to see our sins, to turn away from them and turn back to God. We need to see where we have relied on ourselves in the past year more than we've relied on God. We need to see where we did not love like God has called us to love, where instead we held on to silly petty grudges that in the scheme of things mean absolutely nothing. Where we didn't love unconditionally like God unconditionally loved us, where we somehow thought we were above God and that God should love us unconditionally. But we have a good reason for not showing love to this person. We need to look at all that and just be honest with ourselves and say, "We are filthy, rotten sinners. We do not deserve to be imperishable. We deserve hell." There's no way around it.

We see that message in his Word. That message is there. We might not like it. It might taste bitter to us at times, but it is something that we need to hear and we need to see. God always follows it with the message, "But in Christ, you are forgiven. In Christ you are holy. In Christ you now have that ability that you are imperishable because that's what I've done for you." As you go in that, you will grow in love for one another. You will grow in love and want to serve, not just be served, but to actually want to do something for others. Not just for those that love you or have earned your love or deserve your love, but even for those who don't even notice that you serve them.

When we live to serve God because he has changed our expiration date and made us imperishable, when we live for him, it doesn't matter as much if people notice that we love them or serve them. Yes, our sinful nature will still buck and growl when they don't, but the part of us that loves God and the new self that lives in us says, "I'm doing this to serve my God. That's all I need. I just need to serve my God. I need to know that he loves me and has forgiven me. I need to know that I can live in response to that love whether I'm noticed and patted on the back or not, it doesn't matter. No matter what happens, I know my God loves me. He'll be with me."

That's why it's such a neat thing to check our expiration date and see what God has done for us. Every time you grab something out of the fridge and you see that expiration date, remember what your God has done for you. He has erased your expiration date. He said, "You are now going to have everlasting life. You have it now and you will have it perfectly with me when I call you to heaven." Until that day comes, make use of the time he has given you. Dig around it like it said in that parable that Jesus told.

Dig around yourself and fertilize yourself with the Gospel so that you get stronger and so that you grow. "Look to the rock from which you were hewn," which Isaiah said,

which is all of God's promises kept. Just like he kept them to Abraham and to Sarah, he will keep them to you. Then rejoice in the opportunities the New Year will bring to get to know your God better.