



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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December 31, 2013

New Year's Eve Worship

Sermon Text: [1 Peter 1:22-25](#)

Pastor Randy Ott

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 90](#)

Lesson: [Isaiah 51:1-6](#)

Lesson: [Luke 13:6-9](#)

Promises Kept! Time Passes: God's Blessings Continue

In Christ Jesus, dear fellow redeemed:

The words of Peter's encouragement to God's people are pretty easy to understand. Things change. God doesn't. People change. God and his Word stand firm forever. As you mark the passing of another year, you look back over the year gone by and think about things. No doubt every one of us sitting here can think of a lot of things that have changed since this moment last year. Things aren't the same. We're different. We've experienced different things. We went through different things. We're not in the same place as we were at this time last year. There's just no way around it. I can't tell you how happy I am that I'm not in the same place I was at this time last year. I'd probably be asking Claire what time it is. I was a little delirious about this time last year.

As you look at all the things that we go through, some of them are wonderful. Some of them are joy filled. Some of them aren't. Some of them are painful. Some of them are sad. Some of them leave marks. Some of them change us. As we go through those kinds of things from year to year, we'd do well to listen to the encouragement from our God that he gives us through Peter tonight.

Things perish. We live in a perishable world. The only thing that is imperishable is the living enduring Word of God. The living enduring Word of God brings us blessings that continue no matter how things around us change, no matter how we change, no matter how we are scared or how many beauty treatments we receive or how well things go. The love that God has for us in Christ remains the one certainty in your life. God is really telling you to hang onto it. Know it. Grow in it. And live it.

Your God has blessings for you in his Word. I have no doubts about that. I would guess if you spent time in his Word you've experienced it too. I can still see the woman walking up the aisle to me in Minnesota after church. Her husband had just joined the church a little bit before and she came up with tears running down her cheeks. I'm standing in the front of church just about to go up and take my gown off, and she comes walking over saying, "Pastor. Pastor." I turn and see her. I see the tears and I'm thinking "I wonder what kind of problems are in the marriage or what is going on and what I am going to be dealing with." Your mind goes through all these different things. But she comes up to me and says, "Pastor, I've been listening to the Bible every day on tapes like we've been doing, and it just makes me cry with joy. Is there something wrong with me?"

Think about it. That's what God has for us all the time as Christians. When we make the time to be close to our God, he blesses us. His blessings continue. His love surrounds us. Yes, he shows us our flaws. Yes, he points out the things we don't want to see about ourselves, but then he says to us, "I have taken them away in Christ. You are forgiven. You are mine forever. Come hell or high water, I am going to be there with you through it all, and I'm going to sustain you and strengthen you." I have no doubt of that. That's what God promises. And his promises are always yes.

However, I would say to you tonight as you look at that paragraph at the bottom of Page 2 that there might be blessings that our God wants to pour out on us as Christians that we are leaving on the table. There are blessings that our God says, "This is my plan for you as my people. This is how I want you to be. This is what I want you to do. I'm going to bless you through it no matter what because things are going to change. But here is one of the ways I am going to open up the hand of my blessing and pour it out on you." I think we fail to do it. If you look at the paragraph, have you figured out what I'm talking about yet?

Listen to it again:

Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart. For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. For,

*"All people are like grass,
and all their glory is like the flowers of the field;
the grass withers and the flowers fall,
but the word of the Lord endures forever."*

And this is the word that was preached to you.

Do you see the blessing that at times we leave on the table? *Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth...* that's just another way of saying now that you believe God. Now that you believe in Jesus as your Savior and you know that truth and God has given you faith in that truth, that's just the descriptive way he's saying of now that you are a Christian. It says this changes you so that you have sincere love for your brothers.

Think about this in the early church. Think about the New Testament church that Peter is writing to. Think about how when persecutions came, the people that at times were taking the property of Christians. When the plague came into a city and everyone else fled, the Christians were often too poor to flee and they stayed behind in the cities and they actually cared for the people that had made their life miserable. And the people said, "Why are you doing this?" Then they told them about Jesus and how that changes them so now they love everyone, even those that make their life miserable. And the church grew.

Did you hear God's will for us? *So that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart.* Love one another deeply, from the heart. I would say that's where we leave some of the blessings God wants to give to us on the table. I think as God's people we don't always love one another deeply, from the heart, do we?

Every Christian congregation is made up of sinners who are also saints. Those sinners are going to rub each other the wrong way at times, so there's always going to be friction. You can tell me that every Christian congregation will have that, and I'll say "Yes, so what?" God has said you are to make a conscious decision in your new faith, in your faith, in the new self, a conscious decision now to live that faith by loving one another deeply, from the heart. Not just putting on a nice front and smiling and saying "Good morning" to the person you are mad at and angry with and that you don't want to even talk to. But you put on that nice front and smile and say "Good morning" and then you think "I've done my part. I've loved them." That's not what God is saying, is he?

God doesn't say love one another deeply by putting on a facade. He says, "Love one another deeply, from the heart." That's hard. It's really, really hard. As I said, we are sinners. We irritate each other. I irritate you. You irritate me. You irritate each other. This happens all the time, right? Love one another deeply, from the heart? That's a tall order our God has given us.

But think of how in the early church when they did this God poured out blessings, not only on those people, but on the people they showed love to. God's Word described that for us. God's Word has promised that he will bless us through our fellow Christians when we love one another deeply, from the heart.

This is probably the 5th, 6th, 7th time I've preached on this text in my life. It's probably never convicted me like it has this time. I always wondered why pastors didn't want to stay in their church in their parish they were serving all that long. The last church I was at, I was there 12 years, at Lincoln. That's the second longest they ever had. For you guys, that's just the new guy still figuring out where everything is. But for them, that was the second longest pastor they had in their 125 years. I always thought I wanted to be someone who stayed there longer so I knew the people better and all that and I could serve them better. But I'm telling you, the better that we know each other, the harder it gets to love from the heart, doesn't it? There's more hurt. There's more pain as you look back over things. There are more of those scars like I was talking about earlier. People are upset with you but don't tell you. You hear about it round about third or fourth hand, so you don't even know what is really going on. It's harder to love from the heart as you deal with that. You know what that's like, don't you? In your life, you face it. Isn't it hard to love the person from the heart that doesn't talk to you but only talks about you?

Love deeply, from the heart. Love deeply, from the heart, even those that didn't notice that your life was falling apart. Love deeply, from the heart, those that maybe did and didn't really care. Love deeply, from the heart, those that have caused you hurts and

pains. Love deeply, from the heart, those that have mocked and ridiculed you. Can you get the idea how hard this is? This is what our God is telling us to do?

When you are going through tough times and people help you, those are the easy people to love, right? That's not hard. It's not hard to love those that showed love to you. But love those that didn't love you? That's what your God is calling you to do because that's what God did for you. He loved you when you were unlovable and a sinful wretch. He loved you when you caused him to have to go through hell on the cross so that he could pay for your sins. He loved you when you were the one causing him all of that pain and suffering and sorrow. So now he says, "As I have loved you, so you must love one another."

Love one another deeply, from the heart, is not easy but it is what God has told us to do. We're told by music and by society that love is like a hole in the ground. You walk along and all of a sudden you fall into it. I didn't see that there. The Christian love God is talking about here is not a matter of the heart. It's a matter of the head. It's this new self that God loved me and he lives in me. The Spirit lives in me now. I make this decision that I'm going to love others no matter what they've done to me or haven't done to me or for me or anything like that. I'm just called to love everyone I come into contact with.

I'll tell you, when you're a pastor it's a lot easier to do when you come into the church new. You don't know anyone yet. Yes, I can love all of you. That's easier. It's harder to love when we know each other better, isn't it? This is what our God calls us to do.

When you and I get better at doing this and we love one another deeply, from the heart, and we love those that aren't in Christ yet, and we find ways to express that love in actions, not with a facade, but with genuine love that acts in love toward one another, think of how God will bless us. Think of the blessings he'll pour down from heaven on a congregation that does this, that loves one another deeply, from the heart. Just think!

A lot of you are going to make New Year's resolutions to lose weight, right? We fail, but we're going to make those, right? Think of the weight you can throw off your shoulders if you aren't carrying around all these hurts and you just love one another. That's what our God is calling us to do. And the only place where we are going to find the power to plug in and be able to do that is in the Word of the Lord that endures forever.

We are grass that is going to wither and fall, but that Word of God, that love of God that we find in his Word, that love of God that we find in the Sacraments, that love of God is what enables us to do it. It's not easy. But it's a way we thank God for salvation. And it's a way we become a conduit to bless one another. So it's worth the effort. Amen.