

Pastor Jon's Sermon from New Year's Day 2022

Text: Ephesians 1:3-14.

“Welcome to 2022!”

Welcome to 2022! New Year's Day is usually the day we make promises to ourselves and those around us that we want to do better and be better. We make these things called “resolutions” to eat less, work out more, manage our money better, and cut out things that drag us down mentally or physically. And yet, we often fail at living up to our resolutions days, hours, or even minutes after we make them. Who do we think we are that a simple turn of the calendar will cause us to change our unhealthy, or even sinful ways? We need help.

When we read the scriptures or hear the scriptures we are continuously being called to change and repentance. God's word, through the Holy Spirit, molds us and shapes us to be more like Christlike in all our ways and deeds. But like a piece of frozen meat in your freezer, if it isn't consumed it doesn't do you any good. God's word isn't meant to sit on a shelf and collect dust. It is meant to be consumed, digested, and put into action.

So let's dig in. One way to look at scripture is to ask the question “How is this scripture asking me to change today?”

So in our Ephesians lesson from chapter 1, we learn that we are blessed by God through this person named Jesus Christ.

In verse 4, it says that God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. How many of you are feeling holy and blameless today? Regardless, did you hear that you are already chosen in Christ? I can't believe someone would choose me before I could do anything to earn it. In grade school, the first people chosen for dodgeball or kickball were usually the best players. But to hear that you are chosen in Christ before you were born... does that change anything for you as you reflect on 2021.

Next, the writer who is writing in the name of the Apostle Paul, tells the hearers that we were destined for adoption as God's children through Jesus Christ as an act of grace. Have you ever adopted

anything? Adoption is a beautiful, gracious thing. You love what you adopt. We believe that in our baptism, we are adopted in Jesus Christ. Any adoption is an act of grace. Think about it, as Christians, even if our earthly families fail us, we have this new family in Christ to love us and support us. Does that change anything for you?

Then in verse 7 we are reminded that in Christ we have redemption... the forgiveness of our trespasses... that God lavished on us as gift of grace. Your sins are forgiven. We celebrate this gift in communion each week. Does that change anything for you? How do you respond God's gift of forgiveness? Does it make you want to forgive others? Or do you keep it to yourself?

Finally in Ephesians verse 11, we hear that we have the promise of an inheritance prepared for us in Jesus Christ. On earth when no inheritance is guaranteed to us, we have a promise of an inheritance through our faith in Christ and sealed by the Holy Spirit. Our inheritance includes the promise of eternal life. You can't earn this inheritance; the giver chooses to give it.

So, in Christ Jesus, God has blessed us, chosen us, adopted us, forgiven us, and given us an inheritance by grace. This is not how the world operates where everything is earned and depends on how good you are. Not with God. God chooses to come down to earth to save us just as we are starting with a baby in a manger.

In our Gospel from John 1, we are reminded that if there is an important message you want to communicate, you should do it in person. How many of you have tried to communicate something important through email or text message that utterly failed? We all have been there. Right?

Well, the message God wanted to send to the world, came in-person. The word became flesh and lived among us. Literally God came in a body and pitched a tent among us. So if you really want to know God and God's heart, we need to get to know Jesus. He is God in human flesh. He is God's Word in a body. John calls Jesus' birth and life grace upon grace. Where have you seen or heard grace upon grace this week?

Since Jesus came to be with us, we now live in an era of grace. Grace is God's undeserved love for us. Today you are reminded that you are loved, accepted, forgiven, and adopted in Jesus as is. Does that change anything for you? How are you going to respond to this gift?

Happy New Year!