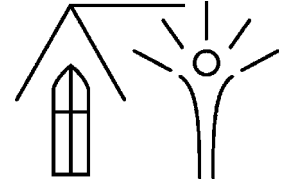




ROSELLE
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Our Mission Statement:
*“To Know Christ,
To Grow in Christ,
To Show Others Christ”*

January 1, 2006

New Year's Day

Sermon – “Yo! Did You Sleep Late Last Night?”

Luke 2:22–40

Reverend Thomas Kim

How many of you actually slept late this morning? It goes without saying, of course, that some of you stayed late till midnight to watch a new year's countdown. I hope your New Year is off to a good start. It is fortunate that New Year's Day rarely falls on a Sunday. Many who stayed up last night to greet the New Year are in no condition to worship today. Though I understand that a few could be heard this morning moaning, “Oh God... Oh God... Oh God...” and then, of course there is football, the real religion in America. New Year's Day is always a day of worship for the true football devotee. But here you and I are in the house of God. This, of course, is where we ought to begin a New Year.

Did any of you have to depend on an alarm clock to get going on New Year's morning? Don't all of us -- whatever our age -- get a little goose-bumpy, inner-smile thrill at the thought: "It's New Year's Day!" and want to get out of bed and get going?

An old year has gone and a new year has come. Do you still remember Terry Schiavo, the CIA Leak Scandal, Hurricane Katrina, the Earthquake in Pakistan, the World Champion, White Sox, The Bears' surprising success in the 2005-6 season, Marshall Fields gone, the terrorist attack in London, the violence and Racial conflict in France, the death of the Pope John Paul II, the continuing Middle-East Crisis, the Stem Cell Scandal in S. Korea? We, as a church, began last year with the Purpose Drive Life campaign with a change of worship hours and Sunday school hour, and we invited Rev. Wes Dorr and Angia Snyder to the ministry of the church. A year, full of our various endeavors, has gone.

An old year has slipped away; a new year has begun. Another year is added to our lifespan. What are we to make of it? There is a somberness about New Year's Day. And we give thanks today for another New Year. Somehow we expect that this year will be better than last year. Deep in our heart we agree with Lucy in the PEANUTS cartoons when she says, “*I don't want ups and downs. I want ups and ups and ups!*” I know we are more realistic than that. Still, we hope for more ups than downs.

There is an old Eskimo blessing that goes like this: *May you have warmth in your igloo, oil in your lamp, and peace in your heart.* That is my New Year's wish for each of you.

Today's Gospel lesson from Luke tells of a man named Simeon who waited for the Messiah for his whole life, and finally met the Baby Jesus at the Temple. He believed that he would not see death before he had seen the Messiah. To meet the Lord was the most important mission in his life, and he offered a prayer after meeting the Baby Jesus. “*God, you can now release your servant; release me in peace as you promised. With my own eyes I've seen your salvation.*” (Luke 2:29-30) He had a clear purpose and direction of his life with great faith.

General George Patton once told about a Chinese man who enlisted in the American army in WWII. *This fellow's unit was stationed in Louisiana. As luck would have it this Chinese soldier got lost on one of the maneuvers. Being unable to speak English he couldn't ask where his outfit was located. He*

was stranded at a crossroads where he attempted to hitch a ride with any army vehicle of any unit. The problem was he tried to use his index finger to hitch a ride instead of motioning backward with his thumb.

You can guess what happened. An army convoy approached. The Chinese soldier pointed his index finger down one of the roads at the crossroads. The driver of the first vehicle didn't stop since he thought the soldier was directing traffic. When the convoy failed to stop, the young Chinese soldier moved to another road and with the next convoy pointed down the new road.

According to Patton, in one afternoon, this soldier split army units so badly by pointing down one road and then another that it took them over a week to locate all of the troops! Troops, trucks and tanks were scattered all over Louisiana and Texas! (THE EXECUTIVE SPEAKER'S NEWSLETTER)

Some people spend their lives going first down one road and then another. They wander nowhere in particular and then wonder why they never get anywhere. May I suggest that as we start this new year, we write down a description of the things we really would like to accomplish?

Let's give ourselves a sense of direction. What are some goals we really would like to attain? Spend more time with our family? Project ourselves more forcefully on the job? Devote more time to the service of God? Paint a picture in your own mind of where you would like to be this time next year. Write down your goals and refer to them from time to time. We will travel more surely in this New Year if we know where we are going. And let's make certain our goals are worthy goals.

I am not going to say that everything will be fine. In the meantime, could I make another suggestion to you? Make some positive plans for the future.

The famous psychiatrist and writer Dr. William Glasser once served as the psychiatrist at the Orthopedic Hospital in Los Angeles. *Many of his patients had serious physical conditions, or suffered from pain. Dr. Glasser's therapy focuses on making positive choices. He doesn't want patients looking back at the past or complaining about the present. He learned very quickly that his patients showed no improvement when he started their therapy sessions with the question, "How do you feel?" This cause his patients to focus on their pain, their weakness, their depression. Instead, Dr. Glasser changed his opening question to, "What are you planning to do today?" By asking this question, Dr. Glasser was introducing the idea that the patients had control over some area of his life. He could choose to walk up and down the halls, to read a magazine, to call a friend. Instead of focusing on their condition, the patients began focusing on their choices. This simple change in focus proved empowering, and led many patients to report decreased levels of pain.* (William Glasser, M.D. Choice Theory, pp. 78-79)

That's what Simeon had done through his life waiting for the coming of the Lord. Then he finally prayed this way: *"God, you can now release your servant; release me in peace as you promised. With my own eyes I've seen your salvation;"* (The Message) He had a life long positive plan to meet the Messiah as God promised. Do you want to face the New Year with some positive plans? Are you at a place in your life right now where you dream of beginning again, of a fresh start? There are some things you must do to truly begin again:

Beginning again requires putting the past behind you. That's what Simeon did. He did not look backward, but looked forward. Those things that bound you in the past have to be released in order to move forward into God's future for you. Have you experienced broken dreams. Broken relationships, broken promises that left you lost and alone? Let go and move on.

To put the past behind you, I want to share with you three of the letting go processes. Mainly, letting go is a negation process which I've mentioned before.

First, the negation process is negation of you by others. We experience it individually as well as collectively. This negation hurts and brings pain and suffering.

We know that those wounds and scars do not go away easily, in most of the cases the victims carry them till the end of their lives.

Against this kind of negation, A women's statement of faith came out of 1982 World Council of Churches said this; "*I am not what others think of me, neither what I think of myself. I am what God thinks of me.*"

This brings the next process of negation. Double negation. Double negation is negating the negation which brings healing and salvation. That's what Jesus did through his teaching and through healing the sick and in loving the sinners. Most of healing and loving in most cases for Jesus was negating the negations they received from the powers that be at the time.

A poem written by one of Korean poets expresses this process of letting go.

If my heart hurts, let it ache;

If the wind blows,

Let it carry away my faint smile,

As I hold my head High....

Let it go, let it ache, let it blow. ...and let it rain. ...but there is "holding the head high."

This is the negation of the negation, double negation. This is what we see from Old Black Spirituals during slave experiences. Their songs, their prayers are their way of negating the slave owners' negation of their humanity. You just have to negate those negations of your humanhood.

Double negation. God's love for us is double negation. God affirms God's love for God's children by negating the negation of them. Though the world says, "You are worthless," God says, "No, that's not right! You are my precious child." That double negation.

Augustine once said that "*God made us lovable by first loving us.*" You are what God thinks of you. God's love is negating the negation.

The final letting go is to let go and to let God take over. "*God, you can now release your servant; release me in peace as you promised.*" Letting go is the process of negation of the self to accept the will of God.

And ***beginning again requires beginning.*** After all is said and done, you have to act. You have to do something if you're ever going to realize the dream of beginning again. You will never experience the joy of beginning again if you don't begin *somewhere*. Simeon went to the Temple to begin his journey again.

Babe Ruth was for many years the all-time home run champion, with 714 major league home runs. But did you know that he was also the all-time strike out champion? In fact, he struck out almost twice as often as he hit home runs. He knew that he had to risk some strike outs in order to hit those home runs. Someone asked Babe Ruth the secret of his success. He said, "I just keep on swinging at them!"

That's true in every area of life. If one door is closed, sometimes God opens nine doors for you. Let go of your past. Let go. But don't just let go, let God work for justice and peace and walk humbly with God. A new year has begun, filled with amazing potential. Make it a new chapter in your life, as you allow God to produce a new beginning through the power of his love and grace in you.

Yo, did you sleep late last night? It is time to wake your spirit up, and paint a picture in your own mind of where you would like to be through the year.