



The Rev. Anthony Estes, Associate Rector
The Second Sunday after Christmas Day
January 3, 2021

Readings: Jeremiah 31: 7-14; Ephesians 1: 3-6; 15-19a
Psalm 84
Gospel: Matthew 2:1-12

Happy New Year!

I, like probably some of you, are preparing New Year's resolutions.

And I am thinking about the treadmill that's collecting dust here in my apartment. And I'm thinking about strategies to lose this Covid 19 weight that I may have picked up due to being at home and not using the treadmill that has been collecting dust.

And all of those are good and wonderful. And if you are adding those to your resolution list, good for you.

But I am also thinking about the passage from Ephesians and how many times words like "wisdom" and "knowledge" appear. The writer of Ephesians is hoping that the recipients of that letter will have the eyes of their hearts enlightened so they may be able to peer into the mysteries of God.

I don't know about you, but I feel like I am going to need some of that for 2021...being able to know what is the purpose and the plan of God for my life.

And it is a spiritual blessing, right?

Some of us may have been conditioned to believe that blessings are about stuff...physical things...wealth, perhaps.

But, no, I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about spiritual wisdom...inner peace...the knowledge and love of God through Jesus, God's son. That is the blessing that God has given us in Jesus. It is the blessing that we celebrate during Christmas season...the fact that God thinks so highly of us...that God joins us in our struggles to make good on our resolutions.

The spiritual blessing is to know that whatever version of ourselves we wish to be on our best days, that version is impossible to achieve without the wisdom and spiritual blessings of God.

We need God.
We need more of God.
I need more of God.

And the wonderful blessing that the Christmas season reminds us of is that...God is already present! God has drawn near to us.

And perhaps what I need is the eyes of my heart enlightened so that I may see all of the ways in which God makes God's self-known to me...and to all of the rest of the world.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord, Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings", blessed...already...right now..."who has blessed us through The Beloved," Jesus, right now.

Everything that you need that pertains to life and Godliness, Scripture says, we have already been given in Christ Jesus, the Word made flesh, dwelling and living amongst us...right now...by the Holy Spirit, living and breathing in us.

We have a reason to give thanks.

As a matter of fact, if you read the Greek text for this passage from Ephesians, the word "*eucharistos*" appears...Eucharist. It is our prayer of thanksgiving...thanking God for all of the ways that God interacts with creation.

God makes those interactions because we are not left to our own devices, contrary to popular belief.

God cares about you. God cares about me.

And God cares about our final outcome.

You see, that's why God allowed the angels to warn the Holy Family to escape to Egypt because of Herod, because God had a plan for humankind, and he would not allow any power of tyranny or darkness to cancel that out. Thanks be to God!

So whatever the year 2021 is going to bring and whatever you have on your list, I hope that you add getting some wisdom and insight into the plan of God for your life.

The spiritual blessing, the spiritual mystery that is — even though we may not deserve it because of our own ignorance and because of our own apathy — that God does not abandon us.

Jeremiah says that God is going to save the remnant of Israel...that means us, too. That when the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, God inaugurated his plan to save humankind.

And one day when Jesus returns that plan will be consummated. That is what the incarnation is all about. It is a constant reminder that God is with us...that God is on our side, even when we take up actions and postures that oppose his sovereignty over our lives.

So that's why we need our eyes enlightened.

We need our eyes enlightened so that we remember that we always have something to be thankful for. No matter what 2021 is going to bring, we will always have something to be thankful for.

And, my sisters and brothers, it will not be thanksgiving because we have gotten more stuff, although that may happen. It is to remember that through Christ we are being saved from the tyranny of sin, saved from the tyranny of darkness, saved from the tyranny of our worst selves.

We are being saved, predestined for adoption the writer of Ephesians says, because God wants us to be in relationship with him that strongly...that stridently...that urgently...that he unites all of humanity under the lordship and in the birth and in the sacrifice and in the resurrection of Jesus, his son.

That is the real mystery that we are going to spend the rest of our lives trying to figure that out. (And yes, many books have been written in this pursuit. You should read some of those books. I know that I have.)

But our innate response to the wonder of God's love and to the mystery of our redemption is thanksgiving.

So, remember that as you tick the boxes off your resolution list — or in three to six months from now when you pull it back out and realize haven't done anything — remember that the real reason for thanksgiving is that you are not alone. You are not abandoned. And the one who has come will come again.

So, again, Merry Christmas and have a great New Year!