

Peter Nijp 2023 12 31 for Knox Bayfield

True faith the great equalizer! Jeremiah 29: 11-13

Here we are, another year is coming to a close and another year with all of its unknowns about to be announced at midnight. For many this past year has been one of anxiety and depression over the state of the world, wondering is God really in charge? There are those who have struggled with economic hardships and those who have grieved the loss of loved ones. It has been a challenging year to say the least with everything that has transpired in the last 365 days and yet as Christians we are left with hope for a New Year filled with the power of God's love and strength to guide us.

Where has this last year left you, where has it taken you in your journey with Christ? Will you strengthen your resolve to be renewed in your quest for a true relationship with Jesus, in this coming year? Is there a hole in your life or in your heart that needs to be filled? Can you see or feel the love of Christ that heals the broken spirit or the broken heart? Jesus said I stand at the door and knock, if the door is opened I will come in. Jesus is knocking on the door of our hearts today, He wants to come into our lives and dispel the fears and doubts we harbour in our minds, He wants to remove the uncertainty caused by the state of a chaotic world and replace it with the words of our scripture.

The words of our scripture today are not idle words; Jeremiah prefaces these words with "For thus says the Lord". At the time of Jeremiah's writing the Israelites were once again captives in a country not their own and in their prayers they once again plead with God for their release so they could return to their own country. God has heard their prayers and this is the promise He gives them, "For I know the thoughts I have toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope." Some bible translations use the words to prosper you, but for some those words are misleading because they can easily be misunderstood to mean some sort of material gain.

God wants us, you and I to experience peace, a peace that comes from knowing that our God is in control of our future, and because of this control by God in our lives we have hope in Christ for our salvation. Our hope is secure because of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus; we can place our trust in the promise that when we believe in Him and live according to His will we will be saved. In Proverbs we read these words "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make straight your paths.

When we live our lives according to the will of God in trust; God says "Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you". No matter what this New Year

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may bring isn't it good to know that wherever you are or wherever you go God is within listening distance. We are not alone we have a God who walks and talks with us each and every day.

Maybe you are wondering what this New Year will hold in store for you, maybe you have resigned yourself into believing it will not be any better than this last year was. I have a news flash for you, this is not breaking news, this is the good news of Jesus Christ and the promise of His coming again to claim those who are His. You can change the world! In order to change the world we must make a choice as to who we follow, will we follow the politicians with their hollow rhetoric or those who claim that we can do it on our own, or will we follow Christ? In choosing Christ we change who we are because we become a new being in Him. No longer will we wade in the shallow water of fear, doubt and insignificance; instead we will set our sails on the living water of Jesus and reach the shores of love and contentment; we will transform others by our attitude of thankfulness and the sharing of God's many blessings. There was an anonymous quote I read a while back "fear knocked on the door, faith answered and there was nothing there."

All of the self help books written by as many authors or videos that promise they will heal the hurting soul are inconsequential compared to the written word of God found in our bibles. In verse 13 we read "And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart". Where better to find God than in prayerfully searching the scriptures. Take the time to spend it in silence as you concentrate on hearing that small still voice of God that whispers "You are mine, I love you". What greater way to step from this year into next knowing that you are a child of God, a prince or princess in God's royal family? Search for Him diligently and open your heart to possibilities you never knew existed.

The choices we make today will follow us into tomorrow so let us choose wisely; let us choose God to lead us into tomorrow and the rest of next year. It is true that this past year has been filled with the news of wars and political unrest around the world but if we make the right choice today we will be able to chime in with the hymn writer when he writes "My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness".

Is there a hurt in your life tonight, are you afraid of what this coming year may bring; then let me remind you of the title of this message "Faith is the great equalizer". Faith is the cornerstone of our foundation in Christ for without faith Christ becomes just someone who lived years ago, but with faith Christ lives in our hearts.

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Kings and queens, presidents, prime ministers and dictators will live for a time but Christ lives forever and his power is unfailing and knows no end. Times will change but Jesus is unchanging He is the same today as He will be tomorrow and to the end of time as we know it on earth. When we place our faith in Christ his power is more than equal to whatever may befall us, be it fear, doubt, anxiety, or anything else that may be a cause for hurt in our life. Is there a hurt or situation in your life where Christ can intervene and give you peace, then take it to the Lord in prayer?

This coming year can be an opportunity to be renewed in our Christian life; it can be a time where the evidence of Christ's love in our lives is sorely needed to be shared with those who have lost hope, those who are feeling the pain of separation from God, and those whose economic situation has become untenable. In sharing what we have been blessed with from God we can truly help to make it a happier new year for someone else. Faith may be only a four letter word to some but for those who have true faith it is a myriad of experiences that defy description by mere words. True faith allows us to step into situations that may seem risky, but faith tells us God is at our side protecting us from harm. Faith changes the impossible into possible as we endeavour to reach new goals that line up with the purpose of God for our lives.

One of the great detractors in our Christian living is attitude. When we change our attitude from impossibility thinking to possibility thinking we change the way we live. No longer will we look at life as a glass half full instead we will allow God to fill our life's glass to overflowing. We then like David will exclaim "My cup runs over". In faith there is no defeat; Job 24:1 puts it this way, "Then Job answered the Lord and said, I know that you can do all things and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted".

As I write this message the world is in chaos; the Middle East is in the turmoil of war. The fighting for freedom continues in the Ukraine and the persecutions based on religion are an everyday occurrence; governments are in disarray; and yet my faith tells me that my God is still in control for all of these things have been foretold in our scriptures. God's plan for His people will not be thwarted for He has set a time when every knee shall bow to Jesus and those who are chosen will live with Him in eternity.

Where will your faith take you this New Year, will you be that agent of change at work or at school or in your daily activities as you go about the day to day work? Will others be able to see your faith in action? Trust in God and let your faith allow God to fulfil your dreams into reality.

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Walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee Jesus speaks to a few fishermen and says come, Jesus intervened in the lives of those men and He wants to intervene in our lives as well as he bids us come. When we follow Him life will never be the same again as is seen in the lives of the disciples. We will experience the joy of living a life of purpose a life dedicated to changing the world around us; each day will be a new day that will present new opportunities to serve the One who gave His life so that we could live fuller lives.

I urge you do not be held captive by old ideas, old fears, old anxieties or the thoughts of hopelessness. These things hold us prisoner and they do not allow us the freedom of finding our purpose in Gods will for our lives. Verse 13 says; "When you search for Me with all your heart. I will be found by you, says the Lord, and I will bring you back from your captivity." As you enter this New Year with its sable rattling around the world and all of the doom and gloom of the daily news, take the time to search for God with all your heart and let Him release you from the captivity of your doubts and fears.

A number of years ago I watched as Nick Vujicic was introduced on a television show; Nick a Christian evangelist and motivational speaker was born without arms or legs. Nick faced immense physical and emotional challenges growing up, but through his faith in God, he was able to overcome his limitations and inspire millions of people around the world. Nick was able to do most things that we take for granted but he did not let what seemed to be impossible to hold him back from the things he knew could be possible. Nick changed his attitude from despair to victory by his faith in God.

In many ways we are all like Nick, each of us have certain limitations that we need to address and overcome each of us need the help of God to give us the strength to overcome. As you go into this New Year no matter the limitations you feel that have been put on your life let your faith in a changeless God be your guide and equalizer. I wish each of you no matter what your situation may be a Happy and prosperous New Year. Let God be your guide and your faith be your walking stick to lean on and keep you balanced. Amen

Prayer

Heavenly Father, Creator of the universe we live in be and abide with us this coming year. Grant us the strength of our faith to face adversity and to overcome the challenges as they present themselves. We thank you Lord that you have promised never to leave or forsake us, continue to guide and nurture us as we follow your Son Jesus Christ in whose name we pray.