

Good News of Peace

January 2016 A.D.

A Caring Family ✦ Reaching Out ✦ Sharing Christ's Love ✦ Teaching God's Word!

From the Pastor's Desk

Dear Friends in Christ,

Happy New Year! As I am writing this, it isn't the New Year just yet. But by the time most of you are reading this, it will be.

I am writing this month's column from my mom's place in Peoria, Illinois. We drove down the day after Christmas to be here for a few days before returning in time for our New Year's Day service. Living a 10-hour drive away makes it difficult for us to visit very often. The last time we were able to do so as a family, in fact, was at the same time last year. So it is always good to have the opportunity to return to Peoria for at least a few days. Not only does my mom live here, but Peoria is also where I was born and spent my entire childhood.

As a result, returning to Peoria, and visiting my mom's, in particular, always makes me conscious of the passage of time. Although we lived roughly half an hour from Peoria for 8 ½ years before moving to Rogers City, I have not lived in Peoria itself year-round since I left for college in 1990. And almost every time I return, I notice that something has changed: new restaurant there, old building gone there, etc.

Here at my mom's, I am surrounded by such reminders. These reminders remain pretty constant from one visit to the next. On the wall in the hallway: pictures of my two younger brothers and me through the years, beginning from when we were just a few years old. On the wall in this room: pictures of our family through the years, all reminding me that, not only have the rest of us aged, but my dad is no longer with us. Over on the bookshelf, a picture of my own children when they were much younger. On the same bookshelf, and here and there, are various other knick-knacks, some of which I have

been looking at for more than 43 years.

On this particular visit, we were also able to spend some time with my youngest brother and his family. Just prior to Christmas, he turned 40. That reminded me that, wait a minute, didn't I just turn 40?! I mean ... 30 ... 20 ...? And their children, who are just 3 and 1 and quite tiny in comparison with our own (how did that happen?), were another reminder of how quickly time passes.

As some of our members were on Christmas weekend, and apparently all of Rogers City early in the week during the snowstorm, we were also without power for roughly two days during our brief visit here. It came back on early this morning, just in time for us to get ready to head back to Michigan. Losing power, and waiting anxiously for it to be restored, is one of those times in which time doesn't seem to pass very quickly. However, it does tend to remind me of the importance of the simplest blessings. We didn't have heat, or light, or electricity, during that time, and that changed some of our plans, but we did still have each other's company. And once the power returned, we were awfully grateful to have back all those simple blessings we so often take for granted.

At the beginning of a new year, we cannot help but be mindful of the fact that, yes, time marches on. At times, as we remember days gone by and things that have changed over time, that may well bring us some measure of sadness and sorrow. However, it can also be a reminder of God's incredible goodness and grace in providing those same blessings, even though the blessings themselves may change a bit from one year to the next. I invite you to celebrate the New Year, as you look both backward and forward, with that perspective.

I also invite you, at the beginning of the New Year, to be mindful of the

simplest blessings in your own life. We don't all have everything we want. We may not have everything we think we need. We don't all have the newest and best of everything. But we do all have many, many things for which to be thankful to God. And many of those are blessings we may often take for granted. Maybe, for example, until we don't have them for a while.

As I say that, and as I tried to remind myself when I was tempted to complain this week, I am also mindful of the fact that some in recent days, in Texas, and Missouri, and elsewhere in both the Midwest and the South, have lost everything. As we give thanks to God at the beginning of the new year for His many blessings to us, may He move us to willingly share with those around us who may be in need. One way to do that is to keep up with our Synod's ongoing Disaster Response efforts, either at their web site at www.lcms.org, or on their Facebook page at The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

Finally, our single greatest blessing, of course, is Christ, and all that God gives us as His children in and through Him. And those are blessings, thanks be to Him, that never change from one year to the next! A happy and blessed New Year to each of you in Him!

In His Service,

Pastor Derek Riddle

BOARD OF ELDERS

The old has gone, and the new is here. According to our calendar the year 2015 has gone, and the new year 2016 is now here. In the church calendar, Advent is a time of waiting with excitement for Christmas and baby Jesus to be born. Now Christmas was here, and now it is gone, or is it? Yes, we have celebrated with family and friends and opened our gifts that we received from others. The

Christmas season just seems to come and go, and the joy of Christmas seems to pass as these cold wintery months come upon us. But wait! On the church year calendar Christmas lasts for 12 days, and that takes us to Epiphany, January 6th, and Christmas continues. Christmas continues not just through Epiphany but through the whole year and through our whole life. On Christmas we received our greatest gift....JESUS! Has Christmas come and gone? NO! NEVER! Christmas is with us and in us through our whole life. We enjoy our greatest gift that we have ever received on Christmas day. The gift of baby Jesus who came to save us and give us everlasting life in heaven with HIM. We can enjoy Christmas every day as we hear His Word in worship and Bible study, when we read the Bible and have devotions, and when we have fellowship with one another and encourage one another. We have the joy of celebrating Christmas every day of our lives by remembering the gift of baby Jesus and all the gifts that we receive daily. By sharing these gifts with others we get to celebrate Christmas every day of our lives.

The Lutheran Hour

The Lutheran Hour can be heard locally on Sunday mornings at 7:00 a.m. on 92.5 FM and at 11:00 a.m. on 1450 AM. You can also listen on-line or via podcast at www.lutheranhour.org. Now you can also download the new Lutheran Hour Mobile App to your mobile device. Instructions for doing so can be found at www.lhm.org/apps/.

January 2016 Schedule:

January 3

"Life in Context"

Lutheran Hour Speaker: Rev. Gregory Seltz

Life is not up for grabs or out of control. Find real life in the context of Christ's cross and resurrection. (Ephesians 1:3-14)

January 10

"What's Running Your Life?"

Lutheran Hour Speaker: Rev. Gregory Seltz

When Christ runs your life, beauty and blessing flow to you and through you to others.

(Romans 6:1-11)

January 17

"Not What You'd Expect"

Lutheran Hour Speaker: Rev. Gregory Seltz

Jesus turns water into wine and challenges our notions of what God should or shouldn't do. (John 2:1-11)

January 24

"Real Freedom"

Lutheran Hour Speaker: Rev. Gregory Seltz

Jesus brings the jarring message that real freedom can only be received from Him and real freedom is following Him in all things. (Luke 4:16-21)

January 31

"If Jesus Had Stayed"

Lutheran Hour Speaker: Rev. Gregory Seltz

God wants us to love Him in response to His love for us. (Luke 4:42b-43)

Stewardship Corner

"In all things I have shown you that . . . we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive'" (Acts 20:35). And indeed it is. Does this not strike a chord that resonates in us all? Which of us can't recall the look of surprise and thanks for the Christmas gifts that we labored to give to those whom we love? And the joy written on their face when that gift is received with thanksgiving means more than all the gifts we have received. It is more blessed to give than to receive.

Our Lord knew this because He practiced it. He gave of Himself, sparing not even His life in death, in order to give us back to our Father in heaven. He knew that in giving, you get more because in giving joy is multiplied: the one who receives and the one who gives both rejoice in what is given and received. What is more the one who receives is thankful and only wants to give back to the one who gave so generously.

So also with our tithes and offerings in church. We want to give because we have received from God all that we are and all that we have. Our giving does not originate in what we must do to earn God's favor. We have God's favor because of the gift of His Son which we receive through Word and Sacrament. Thus, we are made free from the compulsion of giving. Now our tithes and offering are freely given in thanksgiving for what God has so generously given to us.

Why then does the church struggle to make budgets? Why does the church always seem stretched so thin? After all the Church is the place where God not only gives to us once, but continually again and again. And what gifts He gives! He gives us the forgiveness of sins, generously pouring out His grace and mercy because He loves us. So why does the church struggle?

It is because sin still clings to us. Our fallen nature makes us selfish and miserly. It leads us to believe that we can have our cake and eat it too. Because of sin we want to receive, but not give. We want God's blessings, but we don't want to share them with those around us. We want to remain comfortable in our own self-contained, neat, and tidy lives, without the headaches of loving those around us by helping them in their time of need.

"Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" Remember that God has placed you in a church, not only to receive His grace and mercy, but also to use you to bless others. Your tithes and offerings ensure that those around you have a pastor to preach the life-saving and life-giving Word of God. They ensure that the lights and heat and air-conditioning are working. They ensure there is water for Holy Baptism and bread and wine for the Holy Communion. Everything the Church does, she is able to do by and through the generosity of the members of the Church.

So remember the words of the Lord Jesus. It is more blessed to give than to receive. And remember the joy that attended the gifts you gave at Christmas. This same joy attends your gifts to the church.

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