

Psalm 19:14 Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.

1 Timothy 1:2 ...Grace, mercy, and peace, from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.

“New Year’s Hope”

Luke 12:35-40

Introduction: Quiet Desperation

The poet Henry David Thoreau famously wrote, “The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation.” The quote is repeated often because it touches a nerve for most people. We live our lives always hoping that tomorrow will bring a better day. Single people hope they will meet the love of their life. Career people hope that the next promotion will satisfy them. Elderly people just wish their arthritis would go away.

A Holiday of Hope

Back in my seminary days, I worked for a catering company that put on big events for New Year’s Eve. The owner of the company was always telling us, “New Year’s Eve is a silly holiday. It’s a stupid holiday.” He would say that because he was short of workers and he was trying to convince as many of us as possible to work, not party, that day.

Whenever New Year’s Eve rolls around, I remember this boss. I didn’t particularly care for him. He was a stingy man that was always trying to squeeze the most money out of his business. He paid less than other catering companies but I worked for him because the other companies never had openings.

Even though I didn’t care for him very much, I do think he had a point about New Year’s Eve being a little silly. Really, it is the winter solstice

(December 21) that determines when the days start getting longer. Advent begins the new church year. So why do we celebrate such an arbitrary holiday?

The obvious answer is that it is a new calendar year. But there is more to the answer than that. What we celebrate on New Year's Eve is the hope that next year things will be a little bit better than last year. Christians celebrate this hope as do non-Christians. So New Year's Eve is really a holiday of hope.

Hope against All Odds

We hope but at the same time, deep down, most of know that next year will not be profoundly different from this year. Some things may get a little better. Some things may get a little worse. Next year, we might make more money or we might make less. We might be in better health or worse.

For some individuals, 2007 will be a great year. For some it will be a terrible year. There are teenagers in our congregation who might have their first kiss in 2007 and always remember that year with fondness (like I remember 1984). There are seniors who will lose a loved one in 2007 and they may think of it as a bitter year. Either way, the cycle of our lives keeps rolling along.

It is easy to get lulled into this cycle. It is easy to get accustomed to the slow, steady pace of time. It is easy to lose hope that things will ever change.

Christian Hope

That is where we as Christians are different from non-Christians when we think about the future. We know we have to live in this world. We know we should do our best to care for God's creation but our hope

extends beyond this world. We know that life in this world will continue to be more or less the same until a dramatic break comes.

Our Gospel lesson teaches us to be ready for that break, that intrusion from above that will produce a radical departure from anything in our past. Jesus tells us in the Gospel lesson, “Stay dressed...keep your lamps burning...be like men who are waiting.”

Conclusion: Hope in Christ

I hope that is why we are gathered here tonight. I hope we are gathered here to say, “Lord, we are waiting. Come again soon. We want to be with you.” Our hope as Christians centers on the Second Coming. As St. Paul wrote:

1 Corinthians 15:19 If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men. 20 But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

Therefore, we put our hope in him. He is our only hope for a radical change in 2007. It is only our reunion with him that will take away our age, our infirmities, our fear of failure and all those other weaknesses that make life in this world difficult. We set our hope on him.

2 Thessalonians 2:16 May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, 17 encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word. Amen