

Cross-Words: Repent, Repeat
Isaiah 45:22-25
January 1, 2017

“Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other. By myself I have sworn, my mouth has uttered in all integrity a word that will not be revoked: Before me every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear. They will say of me, ‘In the Lord alone are righteousness and strength.’ ” All who have raged against him will come to him and be put to shame. But in the Lord all the descendants of Israel will be found righteous and will exult.

Grace, mercy, and peace from our God of new beginnings; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The coming of another new year brings us the opportunity to make a new beginning. It's a time to evaluate the past year, review how we have lived, and decide what we need to change to make this year better than the last.

As we remember the sorrows and joys, the problems and the blessings of the past year, we have a chance to leave all the bad things behind and take the good ones with us. We can have a fresh start. It's good to know that we can take down the old calendar and hang up a new one?

But before we throw away the old calendar, let us take a good look at it. What were the precious, memorable, or pivotal days of the past year? What was the overall theme of your past year? Were most of your days weighed down with stress or were they filled with peace and happiness?

A look at the old calendar can reveal patterns of living. We tend to repeat certain attitudes, moods, and behaviors. As the saying goes, “history repeats itself.” Recognizing these patterns can help us quit bad habits and replace them with good ones.

When we discover what needs to be changed, we repent (turn around and go the other direction) and, with God's forgiveness and help, we move forward in life. What are the patterns of your life? What good behaviors do you want to continue or start? What bad habits would you like to change?

There is a universal pattern of human behavior in all of human history. All of us here today have that pattern of behavior. It's an evil tendency – something that needs to be changed. Scripture calls it sin.

The people Isaiah was speaking to in our text understood that history repeats itself. Their forefathers, who traveled with Moses in the wilderness, often murmured against God. They complained about Moses. They rebelled by worshiping false

gods. Even in the Promised Land, they continued to do things God told them not to do, and not to do the things God told them to do.

The book of Judges shows a deeply ingrained pattern of sin. Each time the Israelites abandoned the one true God, God allowed them to be oppressed by their enemies and they became slaves in their own land. Yet, God showed the pattern of his love by repeatedly sending leaders to defeat the enemy and reestablish faithful worship in the land. It's amazing how many times that cycle was repeated.

This repetition demonstrates how firmly rooted our tendency to sin is, and how great God's love is. When we repent, God stands with open arms ready to receive us and restore us. God tells us through Isaiah: *there is no God apart from me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none but me* (Is 45:21 NIV).

The pattern that plagued the Israelites has been with us since before our birth. We are by nature enemies of God and we continue to turn away from him and follow other gods. We may not have wooden idols in our homes, but we don't always put our trust in the Lord. We spend our time and effort pursuing money, fame, recreation, leisure, or pleasure to the exclusion of God and his will.

Ever since the crash of the stock market on "Black Monday," October 19, 1987, many investors have been reluctant to keep all their investments in one area. Instead of "putting all their eggs in one basket," they diversify just to "play it safe." They try to cover all the bases.

That's how we sometimes treat our faith in God. We love God, but we don't place 100% of our trust in him. We feel that we need to diversify spiritually and place part of our trust in our bank account, our possessions, our intelligence, our skills, or our accomplishments.

Once we begin shifting our trust away from the Lord, not only have we broken the First Commandment, we neglect the other commandments as well. One thing can lead to another. Sin can snowball resulting in cursing, rebelling against authority, abusing others, and filling our minds with lustful thoughts. Diversification is a terrible idea when it comes to our Christian faith.

Fortunately for us, God's pattern of behavior is more consistent and predictable than ours.

Even though Israel disregarded and deserted the Lord for false gods, he repeatedly redeemed and restored them. When they were slaves in Egypt, God sent Moses to bring them out of captivity. When the Midianites and Philistines menaced them, God raised up Gideon and David to deliver them. When the Israelites were taken into captivity in Babylon because of their unfaithfulness, God used the heathen king, Cyrus, to restore them to the Promised Land.

We praise God for repeating his history for us Gentiles in the person of Jesus Christ. With prophetic eyes, old Simeon foresaw God's faithful history: *For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel* (Lk 2:30-32 KJV).

To most of the people in the temple, Jesus looked like all the other baby boys brought to be circumcised. But through the eyes of the Holy Spirit, Simeon saw something more. He was holding the baby who was sent by God to save all people. He understood that through Jesus, God invites everyone to: *Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other* (Is 45:22 NIV).

All of God's repeated acts of undeserved kindness culminated in Jesus' death on the cross. St Peter writes: *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed* (1 Pet 2:24 NIV). Jesus earned forgiveness for our tendency to repeat our past sins.

Once and for all, Jesus proved the love of God in an act of supreme sacrifice. In that one act, Jesus took away the sins of the whole world – forever. Our text describes the result of Christ's death and resurrection for us: *in the Lord all the descendants of Israel will be found righteous and will exult* (Is 45:25 NIV).

The pattern is basic, yet profound. We repent of our past mistakes and seek God's forgiveness and strength to guide our future direction. In every worship service, we repent and realize God's love in our forgiveness. We take comfort in the fact that God's pattern of mercy toward us will continue for Jesus sake.

This pattern of repentance and renewal should be a daily practice for us throughout the coming year. As Martin Luther says in the Small Catechism: *Baptism indicates that the Old Adam in us should, by daily contrition and repentance, be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.*

These days, many people don't bother with New Year's resolutions. They ask, "Why should I make them, since I'm going to break them anyway?" However, when it comes to our faith and our Christian walk, we would do well to make a few resolutions.

The Holy Spirit enables us to recognize areas in our lives that need to be changed. A daily pattern of turning to the Lord in repentance for renewal will change our lives for the better, because *In the Lord alone are righteousness and strength* (Is 45:24 NIV).

The Apostle Paul gives us some appropriate New Year's resolutions in his letter to the Colossians: *Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one*

another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity (Col 3:12–17 NIV).

As people who have been forgiven by God, we have the ability, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to display these virtues toward each other and everyone around us. Every day we should rededicate ourselves to live as Christ's sanctified people.

What a wonderful way to begin the new year – Confession, Repentance, Forgiveness. May I suggest, that in the coming year, we each choose a Christian virtue from the third chapter of Paul's letter to the Colossians. Resolving that, by the power of the Holy Spirit, you will express your faith in God and your love for God by practicing that virtue toward others during the new year.