



## 'Living in Glory'

Second Sunday of Christmas  
8:30 & 10:45 am, Sunday, January 3, 2016  
The Reverend Nancy R. Easton  
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church  
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

[Jeremiah 31:7-14](#); [Ephesians 1:3-14](#); [John 1:1-18](#)

Grace and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Here was the 2015 calendar we hung up on the wall in the basement beside our computer. Nothing was written on it; we just used it as quick reference. Nevertheless, I happily get rid of it. 2015 was a difficult year—not so much for my family, but for the world. It was a troubling year here on earth. And there is a feeling that arises whenever a new year begins that somehow things will be different, that the past is just that—past—and this fresh time ahead of us might breed the very things for which so many of us hope: Peace and justice, caring and sharing, unity in diversity. So I placed the 2016 calendar up on that nail on my basement wall with hopeful expectation.

Of course, a new year typically brings with it a plan of attack by many of us. Resolutions are made. Goals defined. To-do lists of noble actions placed in strategic locations to remind us beyond January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup>. Such as: Eat less. Or at least eat healthily. Exercise more. Save money. Spend time with family. Keep in touch with friends. Give of one's self more generously. And so on and so forth.

Our resolutions are well-intended, and often quite necessary. But few are realized. We might succeed in tackling a couple of goals—I'm certainly not saying we never manage to keep some resolutions. But most of us forget, neglect, or dispense with most of our resolutions by about late January. Were they goals too difficult to attain? Were we too weak to follow through? Did something intervene to conspire against our succeeding? Yes to all three.

I think resolutions and our inability to maintain those resolves are simply a mark of our human nature. We claim to be radically independent, possessing the ability to stand strong on our own. We insist there is this individual sovereignty where we can be masters of our own fate, and resolutions are one of the many ways we attempt to live out that individuality and power. But then our resolve fails. We imperfect human beings fail. This happens so often that we begin to make resolutions more half-heartedly, knowing we won't keep most of them anyway. As time goes on, we have less and less resolve. Finally we end up saying, "Well, that's just the way I am..." or "That's just the way things are..."

Sorry if I burst your resolution-filled bubble for 2016. But I think I'm being honest.

But perhaps there was a method in their madness—those folks that developed our three-year lectionary cycle. Perhaps our reading from Ephesians is precisely what is needed at the start of this new year. Instead of Paul writing a letter to the church at Ephesus and telling those Christians to make firm resolutions, to pull themselves up by the bootstraps, to stand on their own two feet and be captains of their own destiny, Paul opens his letter with this stunning, one-sentence announcement that God has been resolving for creation since the beginning. And God's resolve is firm.

Because Paul's opening salvo is one long run-on sentence, it is easy to miss the many points he is making. I'm going to condense them down to three. What Paul proclaims are three resolutions. Remember what a resolution is. It is not simply that goal we fail to reach, that to-do list we toss by January 31<sup>st</sup>. A resolution is a firm decision to do something, or the action of solving a problem. Here's what we learn from Paul in his letter to the Ephesians. God's first resolution:

### ***1. God has blessed us with every blessing.***

The gift of his son, Jesus Christ, has been the means by which God has blessed us in countless ways. The incarnation is how God has been able to do the following things, which Paul then lists in a series: **He chose us before the beginning of time.** In other words, you and I have been created by him because he wanted to create us—we've always been part of God's dream. Then this: **Our destiny is already in God's hands, having been adopted by God to be his children.** Think about that—we're not having to go it alone in this world, but we belong to him, and are members of his family! Then this: **Our relationship with God has been saved by his forgiving us through Jesus Christ.** So, here we are, rescued from the power that sin has upon us, those things that threaten to tear us from God and keep us from being the people he created us to be. All our failed resolutions don't prevent God from reaching out to grab hold of us and bring us back to him. Then this: **God has shared the story of his love and firm resolve to us through the witness of scripture and those around us.** That means God desires that we understand his intentions for creation, so he finds a way to speak to us so we can join in! And then this: **We've received an inheritance**—a destiny has been shaped for us that allows us to participate in God's will and purpose through all eternity.

We read these words of Paul's and feel as if we've just been served a several-course banquet! For Paul uses words that describe God's lavishing his gifts on us, his pouring upon us an abundance of good things. The long, dense sentence pulls us along with it, and our hearts are filled to the brim by the graciousness of this God who gives so freely. Seems to me that, rather than rush ahead to later verses, it is sweeter to linger over these verses, like lingering between courses of the banquet, savor each phrase that tells of blessing upon blessing. And now God's second resolution:

### ***2. Jesus Christ is in charge!***

We learn in this passage that **Christ was in the beginning, chosen by God before the foundation of the world.** In other words, Jesus Christ was not an afterthought, but somehow always part of God's intention for his creation. (We hear that also in our gospel reading, where John says "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the

Word was God.") And while we'll need to move beyond today's portion of Ephesians, we won't need to go far to find Paul's declaration that Jesus is in charge—just read on in that 1<sup>st</sup> chapter and hit verses 21-23, and we learn that **God placed the Risen Jesus far above all rule and authority and power and dominion; that God has put all things under his feet and made him the head of all things for the church, which is his body, and his fullness fills all in all.** Wow—if that doesn't tell us that Jesus Christ is in charge, has been in charge and will be in charge, I don't know what else Paul could have said! Listen to how Professor Hans Wiersma of Augsburg College explains that reality: "Could it be that 'in charge' here means that Christ is running the show (though perhaps 'behind the scenes')? Could it be that 'in charge' here means that Christ is working even now to accomplish God's good purposes, seeing to it that God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven--often despite human efforts to the contrary?" (Hans Wiersma, Workingpreacher.com) This resolution from God—that Jesus Christ is in charge of creation—means that you and I have every reason to hope again as a new year begins, as this 2016 takes hold. Our Lord and Savior has never stopped working to bring about God's vision for creation. And now, God's third resolution:

### **3. We praise God with our lives.**

Even though God has generously bestowed an abundance of blessings upon us, and even though our Lord Jesus Christ is in charge, that doesn't mean we simply sit back and watch it all happen, like watching the ball drop in NYC or the pickle in Dillsburg or wherever you happened to be. No, we have been destined for a purpose. **Paul says several times in this passage that we live to the praise of his glory.** In other words, whatever we do or say in the next 365 days, and whomever we become as the years go by—in those many and various things of our lives we give glory to God. Remember how we light a candle and hand it to the newly baptized in our midst? We say to them what Jesus said to his dearest friends: *Let your light so shine before others that they see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.* The good things we do, the loving ways we act, the kind words we express, the justice and peace for which we strive, are not pursued for our own glory, but instead point beyond us to the God who loves us enough to stick with us when we fail, and then leads us into ever more faithful ways of being. This is God's resolution—that who we are shines a light on the One who made us, and points others to him till, as the carol goes, "...all the world gives back the song which now the angels sing."

Here we are. 2016 has begun. We hang calendars on the wall with hope. We enter tasks into our digital calendars with expectation. We embrace our discipleship as we listen to our Lord speak to us. And we light candles in this worship, remembering John's words: "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." That's living in glory. **AMEN.**

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