

On New Year's Eve 2019, I preached a sermon titled, "In Christ Alone, We Have 20/20 Vision." The text was Proverbs 29: 18 which reads in the KJV, "*When there is no vision, the people perish.*" The Message Paraphrase puts it this way: "*If people can't see what God is doing, they stumble all over themselves; but when they attend to what He reveals, **they are most blessed.***" We often say that hindsight is 20/20. The year 2020 seemed to be lined up with one crazy thing after another – from a pandemic to murder hornets to political and racial injustice riots to hurricanes and fires to election mayhem to project warp speed for a new vaccine to super spreader events to finally the fear of a new strain of pandemic and surges after the Christmas celebration. People are collectively voicing a sign of hope with the New Year of our Lord 2021 – and claiming that 2020 was a lost year. How about you?

2020 was NOT a lost year. Wait and see what blessings and direction God will bring from the ashes. "*For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to you a future and a hope*" (Jeremiah 29: 11). In the midst of a seemingly lost year, with the challenge of the pandemic and its many effects, God has given us a word of hope: "*Behold, God is my Helper; the Lord is the Upholder of my life*" (Psalm 54: 4-6). We have a Word of hope. We cling to Christ and His Word in the midst of the most difficult of times and throughout our lives. And not only to do cling to Christ, but we share Christ and His victory to a world full of despair. In the midst of all that we have face this year, God has kept His every promise in 2020 to be present with us. Christ was sent from heaven to be our Savior who lived, died, rose and lives eternally to serve as our Immanuel - no matter what we face. God never promised a year without challenge or difficulty - just because we believe in Him. Rather, He did promise that no matter what **even there** (whatever your "there" is), He will stand beside you and give you peace and hope. Christ alone has overcome the world - along with all its burdens. "*Where shall I go from Your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from Your presence? ...If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, **even there** Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me*" Psalm 139: 7, 9-10. I pray that no matter what you have placed your complete trust in God and His promises kept for you!

What witness have you given concerning the past year? How do you think it is perceived by the world when we Christians act as if God was absent in the past year and pin our hopes on the changing of the calendar year? God walked us through the valley of the shadow of death with His constant presence. Think about it this way – there can't be a shadow unless there is the presence of light. Jesus is the Light of the World and a guiding light through every moment of every day. Consider a polite interruption into the conversation about the challenges of 2020 with a "but thanks be to God that He was with us as our Help, Shield, Refuge and Strength through it all." That "reframing" of the past year accompanied by the Holy Spirit has eternal significance.

Yes, there is hope in the New Year of our Lord 2021 because of the Good News. We can't help but share the excitement and example of the shepherds, who upon witnessing the promise kept by God of a Savior, went forth sharing the Good News to anyone and everyone. "*Go tell it on the mountain, over the hills and everywhere. Go tell it on the mountain that Jesus Christ is born!*" (LW, #388)

Wouldn't it be a great new year's resolution to resolve to follow the "anyone and everyone" approach to sharing the Good News about Jesus?! I witnessed a baptism of an elderly man on the First Sunday after Christmas. He gave a little testimony that everyone just "assumed" he knew about sin, grace, love, mercy, Jesus and salvation. It wasn't until recently that a person simply asked him, "Do you believe in Jesus? I would really like to share with you the blessing in my life found only in Him." It wasn't a pastor, teacher, theologian or evangelist who shared Jesus with this man. It was simply someone who shared what was at the heart of their very being: JESUS! As soon as this ordinary person shared what they have in a relationship with Jesus, he desired to be baptized and share in the same blessings. He said in conclusion, "If someone hadn't broken through the silence and shared Jesus, his eternity would have been spent in despair."

The Apostle Paul had the “**anyone and everyone**” approach to sharing Jesus. He shared the Good News with adults and children, political and religious authorities, soldiers, Jews, Gentiles – you get the point. He assumed that “anyone and everyone” he cast his eyes upon needed Christ. **When is the last time you viewed the world in this way?**

Begin 2021 with a prayer asking the Holy Spirit to equip and direct you to resolve to see that “anyone and everyone” is in need of the priceless Treasure you have: JESUS! The LC-MS has some great resources to encourage and equip your new year’s resolution: Every One His Witness materials can be found through your pastor, church or individually at www.everyonehiswitness.org Have you been praying for that certain person? There are specific context modules that teach you how to witness to people with depression, those who are grieving, veterans, dechurched adult children – and many more. Check out the website and equip your new year’s resolution with these materials. There is also the upcoming “Making Disciples For Life” virtual conference this January 11-14. You can register at www.lcms.org

I’ve made a great plenty new year’s resolutions in my life but even as a pastor I have never resolved for the Holy Spirit to daily guide me into the “anyone and everyone” approach to sharing the Good News. People are yearning for a Word of Hope. You have it: JESUS! **Join me in making a resolution with God’s help to daily make an eternal difference by simply sharing your greatest Treasure: your Savior, Jesus Christ and the salvation He alone gives.** The Evangelization Team looks forward to encouraging you throughout the year with articles in Servant to Servant. Pray for your pastor to lead a “Every One His Witness” workshop for your entire congregation.

We are also looking for people with a “anyone and everyone” heart to serve on the Evangelization Team. Interested? Email me at gracelc.pjd@gmail.com I will explain the joys of serving on this team. In Christ Alone is a HOPE that cannot be disappointed. Join the shepherds and GO TELL IT ON THE MOUNTAIN AND EVERYWHERE!

God’s Blessings for a Hope-Filled New Year of our Lord 2021!

Reverend John Diener
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