

**“Another Year of Grace!” New Year’s Day Sermonettes**  
**Pastor Thomas Kock and Vicar Jon Kehl January 1, 2012**

**By Grace God chose you for salvation. Eph 1:1-14 ~ Vicar Kehl**

It's the New Year! Boy does it have potential! It's the time to make resolutions, a time for self improvement and a time to achieve our goals. As you enter the New Year has it crossed your mind that this year could be the worst you have ever seen? It's a sobering thought to know that so many aspects of our life are not in our control. What if I lose my job, what if my relationship turns bad, what if I'm a failure etc? How can we celebrate a new year if so much is at stake?

God gives us a great reason to celebrate! No, He doesn't tell us that this year will be prosperous or fulfilling. He doesn't say that life will treat us well; He simply tells us that we have been chosen for salvation. From before creation of the world, we were chosen to be with God in heaven, and He sends a guarantee with that too! By faith you were marked with a seal which guarantees our inheritance with God. I think you really have to love someone to spend eternity together with them, and that's what God promises!

He loves you and promises salvation to you. You are his child and he wants what's best for you. He loves you so much that he chose you before you even existed and decided that you would spend eternity with Him. His love extends through eternity, from before the world until eternity, so do you think He can continue to love you in 2012? Don't you think he will watch over you and do what is right for you this coming year? I'm certain he will.

God chose you for salvation purely by grace alone. He picked you to be with Him simply because he loves you. There can be confidence as we enter the New Year because we His. We're chosen by God. What grace!

**Saved by Grace, Through Faith. Eph 2:1-10 ~ Pastor Kock**

As vicar mentioned, a huge topic at this time of the year are New Year's resolutions. Did you make one? "This year I resolve to ... exercise more, lose weight, get in touch with that classmate/friend/relative, finish that project, advance my education, etc., etc., etc." A pretty typical aspect of the New Year's Resolution is that they tend involve us needing to work at something in order to accomplish or improve on something.

And all of that is fine! God has given us our minds, our bodies, our talents, our relationships, etc. He wants us to use all of it to the best of our ability in service to Him, because He's loved us so.

But in regards to the most important aspect of your life – your salvation – no resolutions are needed, for God has already accomplished it in full, completely. God has taken you from being spiritually dead to being spiritually alive. By working faith in your heart, God took you from spiritual death to spiritual life. God did the work from "A" to "Z." And so we rightly – and thankfully – confess that "it is by grace we have been saved, through faith, and this not from ourselves, it is a gift from God, not by works, so that no one can boast." God has saved you. No resolutions needed, for God has accomplished the work 100%. You can count on it all through 2012. What grace!

**By Grace We're part of the Holy Christian Church Eph 2:11-22 ~ Vicar Kehl**

Have you ever gone on vacation to a place where no one knows you? Sometimes it's just good to get away from everything and everyone, but what if it stays that way, that you didn't know anybody for the rest of your life? I would venture to guess life would get lonely. There would be a desire to be with people you know and be part of a group/family. It is plain old rotten to not to have a support group.

You and I were once that way. For those who are Gentiles we were once foreigners and aliens when it came to the family of Christ. We were once without the "covenants of the promise, without hope, and without God in the world," but that was in the past. One man changed that. Jesus called you out of darkness to be part of His Church with a big "C." That is what the word church means: "to be called out of." That Church is not the church building, it's not one specific congregation, but it is the group of all Christians across the world and throughout time. By faith, you are part of a group that can never deteriorate and collapse. By faith, you are part of a group that continues on throughout time. You are part of the Holy Christian Church because you were called out (Church) of darkness by Christ (Christian) and are seen as holy (Holy) in the eyes of God.

You are now members of God's household and built on the apostles and prophets, with Christ as the chief cornerstone. So we walk into a New Year knowing we are part of a group and no longer foreigners. We can stride confidently day by day knowing that we have an eternal membership that can't be taken from us. We are part of His kingdom with all other believers. What amazing grace that we are built into the temple of God!

**Empowered by Grace, Be Who You Are! Eph 4:1 – 5:2 ~ Pastor Kock**

In regards to our *salvation*, there are no resolutions needed; salvation is complete! In regards to our life of *sanctification* – that is, our desire to serve God with our lives – there will never be a time when there won't be room for resolutions! ☺ In other words, our lives of faith are a constant work in progress.

God wrote Ephesians by the hand of the Apostle Paul. When Paul wrote the book, he was in prison, because he'd been telling people about Jesus. And so he urges his readers, as a prisoner of the Lord, "to live a life worthy of the calling you've received." He urges them to be humble and gentle, to be patient, to bear with one another in love, to make every effort to keep unity. He urges them to put off their sinful self with its selfish and immoral desires and actions and instead to put on their new self. He urges them to never lie, to not let the sun go down while you're still angry, to share, to use your words to build people up. You know, the things that you and I are so, so, sooooo good at doing, right?!? ☺ Well, maybe not. Room for some New Year's resolutions to work on those things? God's Word would certainly urge us in that direction!

But how do we do it? How do we keep at it?

It's by remembering who we are! God has declared us to be *new*! And our new self is created to be like God, in righteousness and true holiness, because God declared it to be that way! And so every time you hear about who you are in Christ, you're also being encouraged and urged to live in a way which is consistent with that status which is yours! That status is an amazing aspect of God's grace! Empowered by it, in 2012, simply be who you are! Be a reflection of God's wonderful grace!

### **Be a Grace-filled Marriage and Family! Eph 5:21 – 6:4 ~ Pastor Kock**

There is nothing which can bring difficulty to a year like marriage difficulties or family strife. How do we avoid those things? How do we make sure that our marriage and family life works as well as possible? The answer is really very simple; listen to what God says. Since God made us in the first place, He will obviously have the very best idea as to how marriage and family works. In this segment God gives us the blueprint.

Wives, submit to your husbands, as to the Lord. Stand by his side, support him. Perhaps a very practical way that you can do that is to let him know that you respect him. Show that you respect him with the words you use, the tone of voice you use, your overall attitude towards him.

Husbands, love your wives. How much? As much as Christ loved the Church, and gave HIMSELF up for her! Love her enough to put her interests before your own, to put what she desires before what you desire. Treat her with kindness, with respect. Use your words to encourage her, even as God uses His Word to encourage you. Be there for her, even as God is there for you.

Children, obey your parents. No, they're not perfect, but they're the gift which God gave to you, and you're a gift which God gave to them. Parents – fathers particularly – don't embitter your children. In other words, neither be too harsh on them, nor be too lenient with them. Remember that you're their parents. You're not their friends, their buddies. Your role as a parent is to train your children so that they're able to leave you. No, you're not pushing them out; rather it's your role to give your children the spiritual, educational, practical tools which they need in order to be able to live as adults in this world.

Wow! Tall orders! How can it take place?

It can – and will – take place when your home is filled with grace! When God's forgiving love is pouring itself upon you regularly, you will more and more reflect humility, joy, peace, forgiveness, etc. to each other. Husbands will reflect Jesus' sacrificial love to their wives; as Jesus willingly respected His father, wives will respect their husbands. As the Father in heaven has treated you with wonderful love, so parents will treat their children with wonderful love. Marriages and families can and will thrive!

But why? All because of God's grace! Because God's love is there! And as God's love is there, it WILL be reflected to those who are closest to you!

### **Protected by Grace, Battle! Eph 6:10-20 ~ Pastor Kock**

There are all kinds of things about 2012 that we don't know, but there is one thing I can assure you: the devil will fight you for everything that you have, and will do his absolute best to pull you off the road to heaven and take you down the road to hell. That attempt WILL be made. For against whom are we struggling? We're struggling not against earthly powers, but against the spiritual forces of evil! The battle is for eternity! And remember – when we gather again next year at this time, some of us will no longer be on this earth; we'll be in our eternal destiny. Obviously, we want to make sure that our eternal destiny is heaven! The battle is fierce! The stakes are THE highest!

And you're ready for it. Yes, you're ready. Why so? Because you're protected by God's grace! You KNOW the Word of God! You KNOW that Jesus is your Savior! You KNOW that God listens to you when you pray! You KNOW that Jesus is with you always! You KNOW that you're going to heaven! You KNOW GOD'S GRACE! And so you're ready.

No, that doesn't mean we can get lackadaisical. No, that doesn't mean that we could/should stop listening to the Word, coming to worship and SS, etc. Indeed, it means just the opposite! Knowing the battle which is taking place, I know how much I need God's help! He gives me His help, He gives me spiritual armor, through the Word and the Sacraments. And so as part of my battle, I will regularly "put on the belt of truth." That is, I'll regularly hear the Word, so that God can continue to give me His grace, continue to protect me in my battle, indeed, continue to urge me to push forward against the devil and his wickedness.

And I fight that battle with confidence. After all, God picked you and me out before the creation of the world! He's loved you and me forever! Surely He will strengthen and protect me in my spiritual battle!

And sure enough, He will! He will because He's a God of grace! A God whose grace covers you! Amen.