

SERMON FOR JANUARY 3, 2021

TEXT: 1 PETER 1:1-2

THEME: A BLESSING FOR THE NEW YEAR

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, **2** according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you.

In the name of Jesus:

Happy New Year! As we begin a new year, we look forward to starting over again. We want to hit the reset button, forget all about the year 2020. We want to begin anew. As we enter this new year, though, we do so with a little bit of apprehension. What will this new year bring? Will it be more of the same as what we experienced in 2020? We are in the dark when it comes to knowing exactly what will happen in 2021.

Peggy Noonan is a columnist for the Wall Street Journal. She wrote these words almost three years ago, but they still have meaning today: “Everyone is in the dark looking for the switch. When you are in the middle of history the meaning of things is usually unclear. In real time most things are obscure. Only slowly did it dawn upon us that the whole world structure and

order that we had inherited from the nineteenth century was gone.” (Peggy Noonan, WSJ, Feb. 2018).

We are presently living in uncertain times. There is uncertainty still with Covid, how this virus will affect us at work, at school, and as a nation. These are stressful times, they are hand wringing, nerve wracking times. And as a congregation, we still don't know how we will be affected. Just look at how things were three years ago and compare that to what is happening today. Some members still are fearful attending Sunday worship. Some worship only online. When can we get together again for Bible study? When will we be able to celebrate and fellowship together as a family of believers? What will this congregation look like on the other side of this pandemic? These are not bad times, they are, though, different times.

So many questions and not enough answers. So we turn to the Lord for answers, and over these next several weeks we will look at the New Testament book 1 Peter. We begin a sermon series titled: “To This You Were Called.” You see, in these uncertain times, God has called us, as a congregation, for such a time as this!

1 Peter was written by the apostle Peter, it is probably the first book of the New Testament that was written, meaning that it is the earliest book of the

New Testament, written 25 or so years after the time of Christ. This letter was written to Christians in the first century who were facing an uncertain future. And who were these people to whom Peter was writing?

They were Jewish Christians, God fearing people. Some were present during Pentecost, Jewish Christians from all over Asia minor, from places such as Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, and Bithynia, people from the same places mentioned in Acts 2 at the first Pentecost. These Christians were well settled in their communities, but they were still considered immigrants. Even though they lived in their respective communities, they had no legal standing, no rights, they were not citizens in the true sense of the word, they were exiles living in a foreign land. These people were lower class people, poor slaves, many were women. In short, these Christians were a minority. They were like modern day immigrants in America today, with no rights or standing in their community.

Peter, though, does not address them as nobodies. They are somebody! Listen to what he says: “according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you.”

God has chosen these people who society considered as nobodies, these immigrants, for such a time as this. God chose them “according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.” God the Father not only knows their situation, He chose them according to the plan He has for them. No matter the situation they found themselves in, God has a plan for them and He is seeing that plan to its completion.

This plan is “in the sanctification of the Spirit”. Peter is telling these Christians that according to the plan of the Father, He has sent His Spirit to make them holy, chosen, set apart, for His purpose and according to His will. Just as the Old Testament people were chosen by God and taken care of by God. from the calling of Abraham, the Exodus from Egypt, the leading through the wilderness to the Promised Land, so too God was at work, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to work God’s plan in their lives.

But how would they know this? Peter explains:” for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood”. Jesus was born for them, He lived for them, He died for them, and His blood shed on the cross cleanses them from all sin. His blood, sprinkled on them in Baptism, has marked them as God’s chosen people. They have been chosen for obedience to Jesus Christ. No matter who they were, no matter their social or economic standing, God

the Father chose them to be His people by working of the Holy Spirit in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

And so these nobodies had the blessing of God and the power of God. That is why Peter writes : “May grace and peace be multiplied to you.” God’s grace was shown to them in Jesus. In Jesus their sins were forgiven. They were bought with the price of Jesus’ blood shed on the cross. Forgiven in Jesus, God the Holy Spirit gives them the peace that surpasses all understanding. Nothing will separate them from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Nothing will deter God from working in them and through them to do His will. God was going to bless them, indeed, God had blessed them with His grace, mercy, and peace, and these were theirs in abundance, for grace and peace was not just added to them, but multiplied to them. God’s blessings were overflowing.

This is God’s promise to us and for us this new year. God’s blessings come to His Church and through His Church. This is what Peter is saying, that God blesses you individually as you have been chosen by Him for such a time as this. If you want to really get a sense of what Peter is saying, pick up a King James Bible and read 1 Peter. You will see that in the KJV, Peter uses the word ye almost exclusively. Ye is the plural form of you, in the south they

say, “you all” Whenever you read 1 Peter, and see the word you, think of you all. All of you, in the Church, have received the grace and peace of God in abundance. God’s grace and peace are multiplied to you all in the Church, for here in the Church God’s Word for forgiveness is spoken to you, He forgives you all of your sins, here you hear of Jesus for you, here your sins are washed away, here you receive the body and blood of Christ for you for your forgiveness and salvation. All this is given to you freely, on account of Christ, in this congregation, in the Church of Jesus Christ. So do you want God’s blessings in this new year and always? Come to worship, receive His gifts! Sins washed away in Baptism, faith strengthened in the hearing of the Word, forgiveness, faith, and peace given in the reception of Jesus’ body and blood.

None of us know what the year 2021 will bring. What we do know, as Christians, is that no matter what we face, we have the certainty that God is for us and that He will be with us. He blesses us, here, in this Church, with grace and peace multiplied. God has saved you in Jesus Christ. He not only has saved you from eternal death, He promises to never leave you nor forsake you. He is your ever present Help in times of trouble. Some will seek courage for the future, others will hope for the best. But we have something more sure

and certain: Jesus, for us, for you. For to you has been born in the city of
David a Savior, He is Christ the Lord!

Amen