

John 14:1-3 We Are One Year Closer to the Goal! New Year's Eve December 31, 2017

By Pastor Kenneth Mellon, Trinity Lutheran Church and School, Pleasant Valley Rd., West Bend, WI

Grace and peace from God our Father continue to give us certainty in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

God's Word to encourage us as we close the year and begin a new one is written in John 14:1-3

These are the Lord's words. May God use them to keep us looking to the goal of heaven! His Word is truth!

Dear Christian Friends,

Another year has come to a close. As you look ahead, you probably have plans for the new year. Perhaps you'll be traveling or making a special purchase or plan to see someone you hadn't seen in a while. Do you ever wonder while Jesus was young what He thought about each Jewish new year? As He went to the temple each year and saw the sacrifices, did He think of His impending sacrifice to save the world? As He listened to Old Testament prophecies did He begin to apply them to Himself? We know that once He began His ministry at age 30, the future certainly was clear. He gradually revealed more to His disciples about His future, especially about His going to the Father in heaven. Although going to heaven isn't usually on the forefront of our plans, with each passing year we must admit:

We are one year closer to the goal!

First, Jesus lived with one goal in mind. He said, *"In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you."* (v. 2) It didn't matter what part of the year it was; Jesus thought about heaven. Even though He constantly helped, healed, or fed people, He still was preparing Himself or others for heaven. He knew the way to the end would be difficult for Him. Considering the devil's hatred against Him, His life was the most difficult of any person who ever lived.

How did He get through those tough times? First, Jesus believed. He trusted in His Father's care. The Bible states, *"When he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to [God] who judges justly."* (1 Peter 2:23) When we usually think of faith, it's about our trust in Jesus. But Jesus did trust in His heavenly Father during His humble life on earth. His faith was a part of His perfect life that He lived for us. Jesus said in *Psalms 16*. *"You will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. You ... will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand."* (16:10-11) The thought of the joy heaven for Him and for all who would believe in Him, spurred Jesus on to complete His work. We don't have perfect faith, but we have faith in a perfect Savior who lived and died to save us.

Jesus also prayed. When you read the Gospels about Jesus' ministry, it seems that if He wasn't teaching, eating or sleeping, He was praying. As the end of His life drew near, He was praying even more! If Jesus needed to pray, how much more we do, too!

The greatest thing which kept Jesus thinking about His goal of heaven was His love. He loved God, and it motivated Him to do God's will perfectly no matter how difficult life was. Jesus loved people. He not only showed His love when He healed or gave sight to the blind; He had such a great love for the world so that He gave His life to pay for all sins. He wanted nothing to separate anyone from God. Once His work on earth was complete, Jesus said with confidence that He was going to the Father to prepare a place for us.

Second, Jesus' going to heaven helps us focus on our ultimate goal. Each new year people make resolutions. Those younger have goals of getting through school, getting a job, or getting married and having a family. Those older make resolutions about more exercise, improving their skills, or retiring. But there is much more to life than those resolutions. Our ultimate resolution is to be certain that nothing stands in the way of our reaching heaven to be with Jesus. Each new year marks another part of our journey there!

With many distractions before us, we need faith in God. Sometimes we sin and can be devastated by its effects. It reminds us that we don't deserve to be with God. Our faith is often weak and imperfect. That's when we need God's Word to remind us that Christ gave His life for sinners. Jesus said, *"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in Me."* (John 14:1) If we ever feel like we are losing our sense of direction, Jesus tells us, *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."* (John 14:6) Because of Jesus, God is our loving Father. He is caring for us and guiding us along each step that leads to heaven. We trust that Jesus is preparing us for a place in heaven!

Like Jesus, we need to pray. Jesus promised, *"I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father."* (v.13) In the Lord's prayer we pray that we may honor God, seek His will and His forgiveness in Christ, and be delivered from evil and temptation. The devil doesn't give up. He wants to stop us and he will do whatever harm he can to discourage us. A new year will not change that in our lives. But we can pray for God to help us through times of testing. He has promised that He will not allow us to be tempted more than we can bear. (1 Corinthians 10:13) As we prayerfully turn to God's Word, we are reminded that our problems now will seem small when we view them from heaven. Paul wrote, *"I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."* (Romans 8:18) As we pray to God our Father through Jesus, we should remember how powerful and loving God is. Nothing is impossible with God! He knows exactly what we need and when we need it! He has promised to make *"all things work together for our good."* (Romans 8:28)

While we are on our way to the goal, God gives us a purpose. Paul wrote, *"Be very careful, then, how you live--not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil."* (Ephesians 5:15-16) Now is not the time to be selfish as many others are in life. We are to love our neighbor as ourselves. Some people don't know God at all. Others are Christians who are weighed down by burdens in life so that they are losing sight of the goal. As we begin this new year, we should remember that we don't have all the time in the world to reach others with the Gospel to make a spiritual difference for others. Think of the Apostles James and John. James served only a few years before King Herod ended his life, while his brother John served the church into old age. We are to use whatever time we have to help our family, friends, and others focus on the goal of eternal life.

As this old year ends, we also are thankful for the blessings God provides to help us reach the goal. Ever since we were baptized, God has connected us to the death and resurrection of Jesus to help us live a new life. As baptized believers, we thank God that the Holy Spirit is powerfully working in our lives to this day. Whenever we celebrate the Lord's Supper as we will tonight, we are receiving Christ's forgiveness of sins that cleanses us through Jesus' blood. We are blessed with the gospel of Christ, which *"is the power of God for the salvation of everyone all who believes."* (Romans 1:16)

Since our goal is heaven, we thank God for keeping us in the faith this past year. We can be just as certain in Jesus in the new year! God is guiding and watching over us as we are on our way to the goal! Time is moving on, but it leads us to eternity! In Christ, we are a year closer to being in heaven. May the past year remind us to keep looking ahead, not just to 2018, but to Jesus and the place He has prepared for us. Amen.