

Calvary United Methodist Church
January 2, 2011

ALL PLANNED
Rev. Dr. S. Ronald Parks

Children's Sermon

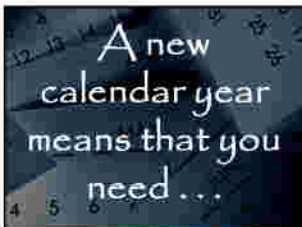
James 4:13-17



Every day is a day to open the great gifts of God's grace. We welcome the children to the front of this worship space to celebrate today's presents.



Happy New Year! It's a new calendar year. What's the number of this year? 2011.



And as you turn a new calendar year what do you need to mark all the days of the new calendar year?



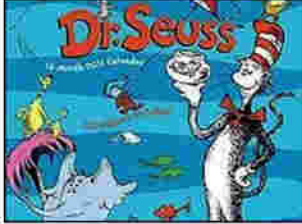
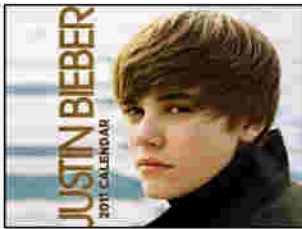
You need a new calendar.

Now, I love shopping for calendars. The reason I love shopping for calendars is because literally there are more 10,000 different calendars produced in the United States and sold each year. Ten thousand different calendars, millions of copies sold.



Think of all the different kinds of calendars you can get. Now most people if they give a minister a calendar they give him one of these inspirational calendars. Those are okay. I like Thomas Kincaid just fine. I enjoy the poetry of Helen Steiner Rice. Pastor Jeff is July's saint in this Saints Calendar. And I also like to read passages of the Bible and inspirational verses each day. In fact, I even had a calendar that has Hebrew stuff in it from the Old Testament that many Jewish people would have. But those aren't the calendars that

really sell.



The calendars that really sell are a different kind of saint. Here is something for all of the ladies—Justin Beber’s cover for his 2011 calendar. Naturally we have something for all the men—it’s Betty White. Betty White’s calendar, by the way, is the most popular calendar that featured a woman on it this year. This getting older thing is looking pretty good, right?

You can also get calendars of movies with classic monsters. Of course if you are into the Twilight Series you can get the calendars for all of those calendars.

You can do TV shows like the Simpsons. You can go books like Dr. Seuss.

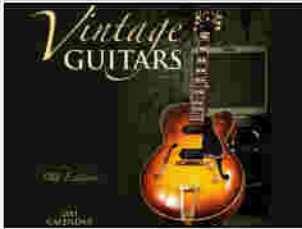
If you are into sports you can look at the Steelers.



If you like to go different places, for example I like to go to the beach; I get a calendar of the beach every year.



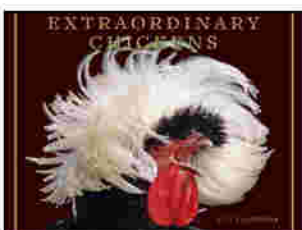
If you like National Parks you can do National Parks. Do you see where this is going?



Then you have the specific interests calendars like the ones I really enjoy. I enjoy the vintage guitar calendars.



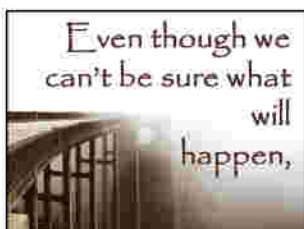
Then there are some calendars that I never even thought you could print and sell. How about the outhouses of 2011? How about this one—goats in trees?



But the one I like the best is this one—extraordinary chickens. You see, I think all chickens are extraordinary, especially when they come in a bucket.



Okay, lots of calendars. They are all very different but yet when you get right down to it after you have opened the big cover page and you look at the page for each month, they are all pretty much exactly the same. They are all like this one right here which is my calendar for 2011 which I haven't even begun to put dates and phone numbers and passwords and computer id's in. All that stuff I



have yet to do. I may work on that a little bit today. But this calendar, like all the other calendars you buy are totally empty because you have to fill them in.

You have to decide what you are going to do every day for the next 364 days that are part of 2011. Some of those things people are going to decide for you, like parents, grandparents, teachers, people that you know, but you are going to have to decide some things for yourself and they are going to decide some things for you. The important things to remember is that no matter what fills these days, no matter what gets written on here; everything from dentist appointments, going to school, music lessons to play dates to vacations, all of that stuff is done in the presence and in the hands of God. This section from James reminds us how important it is to keep in mind that God is always with us as every day unfolds.

Everybody makes plans; everybody writes on their calendar. You might say, "I'm going to McDonald's for lunch." "I'm going to play Xbox with my friends this afternoon." "Tomorrow, I'll go back to school." "I'm going to the shore this summer." But we don't have any idea what's really going to happen. Things may work out as we planned. But maybe not. It would be better to say, "I don't know what God's plan is for me. So I'll do what he asks and trust that God will help me to do my best—no matter what happens. To think that we manage and control our lives is arrogant. We are not God. If we do what is right, we've done all we can do. That's all God asks of us."

Even though we can't be sure what's going to go in those blank holes. Even though we are not really positive, we are going to make plans, we are going to fill in all the blanks because we know that God is always with us. That's what Christmas is about: Emanuel, God with us. God is here and God has big plans for you and for me every day that we're alive.

Thanks for sharing in our time this morning and being part of our Children's Sermon.

Message

Jeremiah 29:11-14



Another day—the second day of 2011. Why do we celebrate New Year's? Why do we make such a big deal about it? I've been in Times Square on December 31st in the evening. It is chaos. And if you think about it, it's really not all that much fun either. But there is a reason why many of us feel drawn to do something to make the change from one calendar to the other.

Many of us make resolutions. We make decisions about where our lives should go and what we would like to see happen in our own minds and in our own witness. I believe as you turn the calendar, as you write the information into next year's dates, it reminds you that things are passing, that time is moving and that what once was is no longer. What will be is still not yet known to us. There will be times ahead that we will rejoice in and there will be times ahead that will be difficult.

Why do we celebrate a New Year? As Christians we celebrate it not because it is an opportunity to be in uncomfortable spots with people who are noisier than ever, consuming stuff that makes our judgment a little bit difficult. We celebrate New Year's because we have a promise. And at this time in the year, perhaps more than any other except maybe on our birthdays, we are aware of how it is that everything in our lives is changing except for one thing that forms the basis of that promise. That promise came to us in so many different ways throughout the scriptures of the Old and New Testament. But it comes to fulfillment in Christ.

So as we are in part of the Christmastide celebration it's good to be reminded of the promises that give us a reason to celebrate New Year and that give us the reason to celebrate every day. The promise is very simply stated. Jeremiah tells the people:

“I know that I'm doing. I have it all planned out. I will take care of you.

I know what I'm doing. I have it figured out. I have it planned out and I will take care of you. This is not an invitation for us to be absolved of responsibility or to now make plans or to not to attempt to



achieve great things. It is a reminder that no matter how much we have planned, no matter how many things we would like to accomplish, that God has a hand in our lives. God's hand is always in a supporting, redemptive and re-creation God is always here to renew us and God will take care of us no matter how right or how wrong things go.

You will not be abandoned. I will give you the future you hope for. When you call on me, I'll listen. When you pray to me, I'll answer. When you come searching for me, you'll find me. When you get serious about finding me and want it more than anything else, I'll make sure you won't be disappointed.

Think for a moment what that means. When you want to find God more than anything else, what would it take for that to be true? What would it take for everything else to drop away and for our desire to be close to God, to be the primary thing in our lives? For most people its tragedy and trial and tribulation and difficulty and illness and loss and grief and sorrow. But why? Why does it take that for us to make finding God the most driving force in our existence.



We celebrate a New Year to remind us that God is with us as we turn the page on the calendar and God is not interested in having us be disappointed. When we seek God with all of our hearts and all of our minds and all of our strength and all of our spirit we will not be disappointed whether our plans work out or not. Because our plans are just that—they are our plans. But our lives are part of God's creation and part of God's story and this day is the unfolding of yet another opportunity for us to give thanks for all that God has granted to us.

Every past needs a pardon. Every present needs a purpose.
Every future needs a hope. Why we celebrate New Year's.....
A joyful end to a season of gratitude
A mysterious dawn of the imminent unknown
One met with our hopes and fears. The hope that we can start over.
The fear that our past won't let us.
I'm still not all I should be, but I am....forgetting the past and
looking forward..." Phillipians 3:13-14

Celebrating each new year finds its deepest meaning in our need to be reborn, forgiven, absolved, redeemed, renewed.

“I will give you a new heart with new and right desires, and I will put a new spirit in you....” Ezekiel 36:25-26

Each new year like any redemption comes not by our making but by HIS grace.

That dream too impossible to dare - Start it.

That mountain too big to climb - Move it.

That shame you're afraid will be known - Confess it.

“Old things have passed away; behold all things have become new.”

2 Corinthians 5:17

For every cross, from every death, there is a resurrection.

A toast to enduring, persevering, forgiving, overcoming and a new beginning. New Years....That's why we celebrate.

That's why we celebrate. We celebrate New Year's as we should celebrate every day because it is a chance.

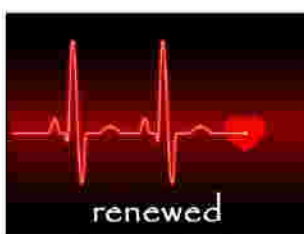
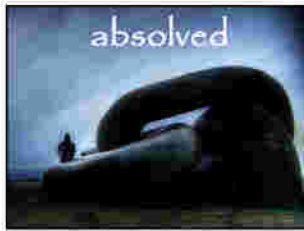
It is a chance to confess. It is a chance to stand before God and let God know that we understand who we really are. God already knows. We are the ones who are trying to play the game. We are the ones who are putting on the brave face. We are the ones who are trying to snow everybody.

We confess in this day our need to be reborn, to start over as new creatures. The power of God can do that with us.

The power of God moving in us can start us back at the beginning, not in terms of our physical life. We have years behind us, but in terms of our outlook, our perspective, how we see ourselves and how we see other people. We may be reborn as new creatures in Christ. And if we are reborn that begins with knowing that we are forgiven. That whatever has past, whatever has gone before, if we confess our sins God is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

There is nothing that God cannot forgive if we will give it to





God to be forgiven. And once we are forgiven we are absolved. We are released from the guilt. The chains of the past drop away. We do not need to carry that baggage any further than right here and right now. And this table of grace has been set for you to have a physical reminder of that release that Christ intends for you. To be forgiven is to be absolved and to be absolved is to be redeemed, to have the value that God placed in your heart put back into your spirit and back into your life. God intends for that to happen.

This is the day to be reminded that it may happen whenever you need to know that you are valued. Turn to God, be redeemed and as we are redeemed we are renewed. We have the strength; we have the grace, to meet the challenges of this day, this week, this year and all the days and weeks and years that God grants to us.

We confess our need to be reborn, to be forgiven, to be absolved, to be made new, to be released, to be brought to a place of fellowship with those who like us confess that without Christ we can do nothing that pleases God.

That's why we come to a time of Covenant Renewal when we as a church, the church called Calvary, in our Methodist heritage celebrate what God has given to us and renew our commitment to each other and to the Lord who has blessed us.