

Pr. T.C. Arnold
New Year's Eve
Matthew 5:17-20
12/31/12

“Should old acquaintance be forgot and never brought to mind.” At least that’s the way Robert Burns wrote the lyrics in Scotland back in the late 18th Century. We hear it sung on New Year’s Day when the clock strikes midnight. Before becoming an American tradition it was made popular in Burns’ home of Scotland and England long before it made it to the good ole U.S.A. The idea of the carol is to forget and forgive past transgressions. Instead, look ahead. The old has passed away and the new has come. “Let all past troubles be forgot.”

Oh that would be nice, wouldn’t it? There is never a seamless transition from one year to the next. You can’t do that. You can’t just forget about what happened in the year past as if it doesn’t exist. You can’t just erase it all. You can’t just write it off and begin brand new. If you have bills to pay, they will carry over. If you have troubles with family or friends, they will carry over. If problems persist at work, they don’t stop when the clock hits midnight tonight. If something is broke it won’t magically fix itself in about four and half hours. You can’t just forget about all past troubles. That would be nice, but it can’t be done.

Perhaps we could take a lesson about such things from our Savior Jesus in the Gospel of St. Matthew – the words from a famous sermon of our Savior, the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus tells us something very important about His work. He says, “*Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.*” In other words, the old will still stand. The Law and the Prophets are still the Law and the Prophets. That will not change. It doesn’t matter what year, those Words given by our Lord are still the Words of the Lord. They remain for the people of God. Those Words will not be abolished. Not one dot or iota (not one letter) will change.

When Jesus came, something very old came before the people. Yet, this was all brand new. What was talked about of old was now standing before them in the flesh. He was the Word made flesh. He came to make things new – not by abolishing what was old, but by fulfilling what was spoken of by the prophets. And that’s exactly what happened with Jesus – and what will happen the time yet to come. Today, we look back at the old acquaintance... not the past troubles... but the one we are familiar with: Jesus the Savior of the world. Today, we look ahead to the time to come. We look with eager anticipation about not only the New Year, but even for our Lord who promises to accomplish and fulfill all things ... to the fullest... when He comes again. And this coming year, like every year in the past, we aren’t going to rely on any calendars, any bold predictions, of the end of the world. All we know is that we don’t know when the Lord will return. That is clearly marked for us in the Scriptures.

So, until the completion of days, until all is fulfilled, this is what we do... on into the New Year and beyond: we look, we live and we love.

We look. Keep your eyes focused on two places each of your days... 1) the cross (knowing where the Lord did His most magnificent work for you) 2) the heavens (knowing that Jesus will come again)

We live. In the shadow of what we see, we live. We live as if the Law matters. We live as people who keep the Law and as people who know we haven't kept it. We live as if the prophets matter. We live our lives today, each of our days before us as if Jesus matters the most.

We love. *“Love the Lord your God with all your heart with all your soul with all your mind and with all your strength. Love your neighbor as yourself.”* God commands us to love God and to love our neighbor. In this world of hate and violence, that is for sure one thing we need more of – love of God and love of neighbor. *“Without love, we gain nothing,”* says St. Paul to the Church in Corinth. Without a God who loved us so much, He loved us to death, we gain nothing. God is love and that love looked out for us, lived for us and loved us to death.

The troubles of our past often follow. They won't just go away from our minds and our lives when midnight hits tonight. We know better. But there is something new for us... this evening... and for the rest of our days. God's love and forgiveness is new. It's new each of our days. It's ours every time we ask in faith. It's granted by a timeless God who intervened into this world at just the right time... to fulfill all things. Jesus Himself is the newness of our days. Jesus Himself is the newness of our lives. May God richly bless you and keep you each of your days as you live in Him... as He lives in you. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.