

Pastor T.C. Arnold  
2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Christmas  
Genesis 46:1-7  
January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2016

A blessed New Year to everyone. Yes, another year. This one will be different. Well, that's what we said last year. For some 2015 was a great year. For others, "not-so" great. Some of us have wonderful blessings to look forward to this year. Others are just hoping that 2016 is a better year than 2015. Either way, the year is only 3 days old. So, there is no reason not to look at this New Year with optimism. I mean, with everything that is bad in this world, and getting worse, maybe we can rather take a look at where we are at right now and have a positive outlook on what is ahead. I mean, we are only three days into the New Year. I'm sure there hasn't been enough time to break your New Year's resolution already, right?

In the Old Testament text for today from Genesis chapter 46, God is calling the family of Jacob away from the Promised Land, to Egypt, to be with Joseph. Now this is something new. And, I suppose Israel (the other name for Jacob) and his family could look at this new adventure in one of two ways: 1) a bit of confusion and trepidation... why would God be taking His people out of the Promised Land when it took so much effort to establish it for Israel in the first place? I mean, the people are where they are supposed to be, right? This was God's promise, right? 2) With optimism and hope... Israel was going where there is family, protection, and food. Joseph made a name for Israel in Egypt and they would be taken care of there. One could look at the New Year with fear, confusion and trepidation... I think any of us could understand. And, one could look at the New Year with hope and optimism. Both, I'm sure were in the hearts and minds of the people of Israel and on our hearts and minds today.

So, which one are you? Are the optimist or the pessimist? Do you see hope for yourself? Do you see the reset button and have the attitude that everything will be new and better for you this year? Do you have a positive outlook? Or, do you only see the negative? Do you see 2016 as a year where things get worse – and all signs point to it being that kind of year?

To be honest, I would not blame you if you see things more negatively. If we are all honest, we see the dark side quite well in the world around us – and I don't mean Star Wars. It would help, wouldn't it, if God would come to us like He did to Israel and said, "*Jacob, Jacob... I am God, the God of your father. Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for there I will make you a great nation. I myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again...*" When God speaks so clearly it sure helps in terms of our own fear factor, doesn't it. We envy the way that God spoke to the prophets and the fathers of old and told them plainly what needed to happen, not to fear, that he would be there with them, and make them great. Oh if God would just do that for us. If He would just burst through the clouds while the year is still new and tell us clearly how He is going to be with us, that He is going to never let us slip from His hand, that He will fulfill His promises. That would be great, wouldn't it?

Well, it happened. He did tell you and He tells you again today. He speaks to you through His Holy Word – the same way He brings comfort, brings life, brings love, and brings His promise of redemption. How did this happen? Well, take a gander at the Gospel text for today. Israel did go down to Egypt – not just for Jacob's family, but for all people. Crazy Herod is looking to kill all the male children of a certain age in Bethlehem. When God said to Jacob in Genesis, "*I myself will go down with you to Egypt...*" He would keep that promise. He did not leave Jacob and his family. He was with them – even when they were in slavery for 400 years. And God kept that promise when "He Himself" did go down to Egypt to avoid the slaughter of the innocent children in Bethlehem. He avoided that death, so that He could die the righteous

death for you on the cross. God went to Egypt with Mary and Joseph, for you... to be with you... to live, so that He could die... FOR YOU!

This might seem like the same old year come around again. It always repeats itself. Well, there is a lot of truth to that. We repeat our bad habits and our destructive behavior. If you are like me, you ate too much at Christmas – and maybe other times too. And yes, gluttony is a sin worthy of repentance. But it's not just that. It's our sinful and selfish behaviors that cause us and other so much grief. We are at times our own worst enemy, even though we love to blame others for our own transgressions, our own failures... and if it's something bad that happens at work, it's the co-worker's fault. If something is wrong with the family, it's our relatives fault. Yes, these same excuses, the same blame game the same sins that we commit are sitting at the doorstep of our lives waiting to ruin another year.

The good news is God repeats Himself, too... in a couple of different ways. When He says something like He did in Genesis and brings His people to Egypt, it is for a purpose. That purpose came around in the New Testament. We are the New Testament people today and that repeated promise is fulfilled in what we hear in the Gospel text. Secondly, what makes this so special, is that Jesus is Israel. He is every promise wrapped up into one. He is Israel, just like Israel went to Egypt before – “to make a great nation,” and, most important for us, what God said then, He says to us today: “*Do not be afraid.*”

Fear not, beloved in the Lord, in 2016. Do not repeat last years old sins. Practice your faith and repeat that instead. Repeat our ascent each Lord's Day to His table. Repeat your prayers for loved ones, for our nation, for the Lord's Church – your Church. Repeat the good habits that you have, make new good habits for the sake of relationships and even your own personal health. Repeat the practice of good stewardship of the time, talent and treasure that the Lord has blessed you with. Repeat the sounding joy of Christmas – peace on earth good will toward men.

Beloved, in the midst of this vale of tears where we live now – the bad news that gets worse for our years – know that the Good News for you stays the same. God has fulfilled His promises. And, in the midst of all that is discouraging and hurtful that runs amuck in our world today, the Lord promises, “*never will I leave you, never will I forsake you.*” That is a promise for His people. That is a promise for you. The people of God went to Egypt to be saved by the Lord's hand from famine. The people of God were led out of Egypt by God through His servant Moses and they were saved again. You were saved when Jesus, Joseph and Mary were saved – back to Egypt. God repeat Himself for you. He did it so many times in His words. He did it with His actions as well. He would repeat teaching, repeat great works of mercy, and ultimately repeat life. He would die and then come back to life again. It's all for you.

It's for you so you can repeat life. No, not life here on earth, but life in heaven. This is the best Good News of all. You will live. Eternal life is better than a fresh start in a new year. And the best part is, we don't have to be cynical about it. We don't have to be pessimistic. There is nothing that could lead in that direction. Only hope is before us in the glory of heaven. And the best part...it's for sure. No doubt about it. Jesus did it. He was saved to save you. Thanks be to God. Amen.

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