

New Year's Eve, December 31, 2008  
Church of the Reformation—Lutheran, Affton, MO  
Text: Romans 8:31—39

### **Past, Present, Future**

In but a few hours we will be greeted by twelve, crisp new pages hanging on the wall of life, each page with 28 to 31 clean squares to be filled in with dates, appointments, activities, engagements for the year ahead. We cannot predict at this time the scribbling that will fill in squares between the sunrise and sunset of the days ahead. We only know that the new year, as every year before and every year to come, is like a cavern, dark and unexplored, that lies before us in which every step is to be a step of faith. Politicians and leaders of nations and companies may lay out plans and voice predictions, but in the merciful arrangements of our Lord the future always is at His disposal and we wait for Him to do with it as He is pleased.

In but a few short hours also, this present year of 2008 will be a fleeting memory. While each of us can point to some great joys that we were privileged to have, yet, as we look at the used-up day-planners and calendars of our lives, we realize how fragile our lives have become. Hot spots of war and persecution dot our globe, connecting Iraq, Afghanistan, and African nations to our lives. Layoffs, downsizing, bailouts, market downturns contribute to the uncertainty that permeates our nation and our lives. When the layoffs are in our own household, when the cancer comes out of remission and flares up once again, when abuse and violence show up in our homes or the homes of loved ones, when death still makes house calls at our homes, we are all too ready to forget this year and to look forward to the new year. So maybe its not just fans of the Cubs, the Rams, the Cardinals, and the Blues who wait until next year.

Behind all the headlines of the newspapers and our lives is the question: “Where is God in all of this?” Saint Paul writes to the Romans with an answer to that question: God is *for* us.

And it all starts with giving, as Saint Paul reminds us that God **“who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him graciously give us all thing?”**

More than just sending His Son into our world, into our flesh and bone, God sent His Son to die *for* us. What a wondrous mystery that Christ, God’s Son, dies in our place, dies to give us life, dies to give us all things of God’s grace and mercy. Because Christ gives us His body and blood in His Supper, we are His **“chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession”** (1 Peter 2:9). Christ makes us children of the heavenly Father.

Being in that family of God gives us a security that no retirement fund, no money fund, no job, or anything else can give. **“Who is to condemn”** us? There are many who would like to condemn us—Satan, the world, our flesh, our conscience that heaps up guilt on our shoulders to the breaking point. **“Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.”** Jesus Christ, with His death and resurrection, defends us from all accusations and intercedes on our behalf. Christ goes before the Father and presents His death and resurrection as payment for our sin. When accusations come flying at us, Christ is our Advocate who answers, “Sorry, I paid for this person. She is mine. He is mine. You can’t have him. You can’t have her.”

Satan, the world, and our flesh have their weapons of destruction, weapons to drive a wedge between us and God, to separate us from God's love in Christ: tribulation or trouble, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, or sword. Though they may appear in subtle forms in our lives, nevertheless they are real. They are as clear and present dangers as is our fractionalized commitment to Christ, as is our sporadic attendance and attention to God's Word and Sacraments. These are dangerous. Yet as dangerous as these are, they will not separate from the love of Christ.

Not that long ago, in River Forest, Illinois, outside of Chicago, a husband sat at a desk in his home, writing a letter to his wife who was in the last stages of cancer. The husband wrote of the blessings they had received in their marriage and in their family. Then he raised a question: "What is the worst thing that could happen to us?" He gave some potential answers: the loss of income and retirement funds, the loss of the affection and presence of their children, the loss of their home through fire or vandalism. Then he wrote: "No, none of these would be the worst thing that could happen to us. The worst thing would be the loss of the love of Christ, separation from Him. But that worst thing will *not* happen to us, for we have His promise on that." Nothing shall **"separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."**

Paul lists some potential enemies of ours: death, life, angels, rulers, things present, things to come, powers, height, depth, anything else in all creation. Notice that Paul does not mention anything from that **past**—that has been wiped out by Christ's forgiveness when His blood hit the ground beneath the cross where He died and when the water of Baptism hit our forehead. The **present** time, even with all our wounds and sorrows and uncertainties, is under Christ's gracious

rule. The **future**, whether it be the year 2009 or our eternal future, all is in Christ's powerful and merciful hands.

If God is for us in this new year of 2009, who will be against us? Who will condemn us? Who will separate us from the love of Christ?

**Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?**

**No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love God in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

Christ and His love have been the foundation of this past year, and will be the foundation for this happy and blessed New Year of His grace.

Henry V. Gerike