

FREE TO BEGIN ANEW

Dr. Fred Fourie ~Sunday, January 01, 2006

Therefore, if anyone is in

CHRIST
a n y o n e

h e i s a n e w
CREATION
N E W

the old has gone, the new has

COME!
C h r i s t

2 C o r i n t h i a n s 5 : 1 7

that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

Today's Scripture Reading is a bit complicated. It is loaded with heavy theology and there is enough inspirational material in this single passage to keep us busy for the entire 2006. For today, at the beginning of a yet unknown year, it also tells us in one passage what treasure God has given us in Jesus Christ. Let us read it as a song of praise!

Ephesians 1:3 - 14 *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace*

After hearing all this, one cannot help to think. ["It is so great to begin a New Year this way! What more do I need? What more can I possibly wish for. Through Jesus Christ I am a child of God. See all things are made new – it is well, it is well, it is well with my soul!"](#)

But then, there are also the realities of 2006 facing us today! Someone put it this way. I am overweight, exhausted and the house is in a mess. All these celebrations cannot go on forever. Time to go on a diet, get on a budget, get back to work and pack up all these ornaments. And why is it that all the Christmas decorations that looked so lovely over Christmas suddenly look so tacky on January the first?

The month of January takes its name from the Roman god Janus -- a two-faced being, with each face facing the opposite direction. Janus/January is a hinge time -- a vantage point from which we can still see back into the past year and yet can also face forward and look expectantly at the year that lies ahead.

There is a story, maybe not literally the truth, told by a Vietnamese Buddhist monk that seems to make much sense on a day like this! "During the war, a young Vietnamese woman was killed. She left behind her husband and her young son. The husband, needing to provide for himself and the boy, traveled far and wide looking for odd jobs. Often he left the child with neighbors. After one long trip looking for work, the man returned to find his village demolished and his neighbors gone. Searching through the rubble, he found scattered about some small bones. He was sure that these were the

remains of his beloved son. He wrapped the bones in cloth and carried them with him everywhere he went.

Many years passed, and one night the old man heard knocking on his door. He called out, "Who's there?" "It is your son!" the voice outside replied. "My kidnappers set me free, and I have spent many years trying to find you!" The old man yelled, "You are a cruel fake. My son is dead. Leave me alone!" He would not open the door. The pounding continued for a while, but then it stopped. Finally the young man gave up and left. The old man never found happiness. And he lost his son who was still living because he was determined to hold on to the bones of the past. The message is clear: If he only believed the good news, his life would have changed for the better!

Our message today is also a challenge: ["Free to begin anew!"](#)

This is the first Sunday of a new year -- a great day for letting go of the bones of the past and to embrace the new and yet unknown future! Someone once said that God created us with eyes in the front of our heads so that when we tried to look back we would get a stiff neck. The possibilities of the future call us to look forward. The good news for us at the beginning of this New Year is that God has set us free, free from the bones of the past. How does such freedom come?

To encourage the Ephesians Paul wrote, "For by the sacrificial death of Christ we are set free, that is, our sins are forgiven." There are no deadlier bones to hold on to than the bones of guilt. The wrongs we have done are often a primary source of our feelings of unworthiness. In Christ, however, we are forgiven and given another chance.

Country Western singer, Willie Nelson recalls his boyhood days attending a small Methodist church. "I was one of those kids who kept going down front when the preacher called for converts at the end of each sermon," Nelson wrote. "I'd see somebody next to me start to the front, and well, there I'd go again. I joined the Methodist Church at least thirty times when I was a kid. Every time I'd do something bad, I'd go join the church again. I'd walk down to the front and renounce my sins and ask Jesus Christ to come into my heart. All of a sudden I had a new slate in the eyes of the Church. Then I'd slip off and smoke a long strip of cedar bark rolled up in a newspaper -- and suddenly I was back facing a life of sin again." "Each time I went to the front and rededicated my life," Nelson wrote, "I wanted to leave my sins with God and walk away clean. I felt I shouldn't have gotten off so easy. I mean, the Church had let me off, but I hadn't let myself off."

Sometimes the hardest person to forgive is ourselves. We are set free in Christ. We are accepted and renewed through Christ. We are set free when we realize that we are not trapped by what has happened to us in the past. Many of us get stuck because we remember and relive old, painful memories. We get stuck and become paralyzed by old bones.

Remember the Buddhist Monk's story? [Do you hear the pounding on the door, telling that you need no longer hold on the bones, that you are set free – that you can let go?](#)

This is a time of new beginning. Be free from the bones of the past. In Christ we are set free to begin anew.

That is the message and also the invitation of the prepared table this very morning! Let go of the bones of the past and embrace new life, a new beginning, Claim your liberty to begin anew!

Welcome!
Come to the Table of Love and Forgiveness
AMEN