

***New Year's Eve – December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2021***  
***The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly***

*Prayer*

Lord, please use this sermon to bring glory to your name, joy to your people, and salvation to the lost. And all God's People said . . . AMEN

*Why I'm Here*

Pastor Jim was able to take several days off this past week – a well-deserved rest. Four services and four sermons over the course of three days was intense, especially since this was the first Christmas in more than 30 years without Barb by his side. Please remember to keep him and his family in your prayers.

This is also the first service here at Redeemer where I have had the privilege of proclaiming that your sins are forgiven – both through the words of absolution spoken earlier and the Holy meal that we will soon share.

I can do this because, according to the Augsburg Confession (Art XIV) "Of Ecclesiastical Order they teach that no one should publicly teach in the Church or administer the Sacraments unless he be regularly called." Ordination is a recognition that you've 'regularly called' me; having been instructed in God's Word and examined, to publicly act on your behalf

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to proclaim and administer what all of us - the priesthood of believers - are called to do individually with our friends, families, and neighbors.

### *Bad News in a Fallen World*

There is bad news in the world because all of creation was corrupted when Adam and Eve sinned against their creator. Verse 35 contains a laundry list of some of types of bad news believers can encounter. Let me share with you some of the bad news from around the world this past year.

### ***Calamity***

I think that COVID fits into this category. All of us have been affected in one way or another - either knowing someone who has died or had their livelihood impacted by rules and regulations, not to mention the fights over whether worship and other spiritual care were 'necessary functions.' Around the world church leaders from Egypt to Latin America told Open Doors - a mission agency that supports persecuted Christians - that bans on church services caused donations to drop by about 40 percent, reducing their own income and the ability of their congregations to aid the wider community.

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"We've been fighting a virus we cannot see with the naked eye," said Curry [CEO of Open Doors]. "Less known, but equally as viral, is the discrimination, isolation, and violence against Christians using COVID-19 as leverage and justification."

***Persecuted***

"Reports from counties in Henan (huh-naan) and Jiangxi (yee ang shee) provinces [of China] say cameras with facial recognition software are now in all state-approved religious venues. Many of these cameras are reported to be installed next to standard CCTV cameras, but they link to the Public Security Bureau, meaning artificial intelligence can instantly connect with other government databases. The facial recognition software is linked to the 'Social Credit System' in China, which monitors the loyalty of citizens with regards to the tenets of communism."

***Hungry & Destitute***

When asked "What do you see is the most serious problem resulting from this persecution and terror?" Mark von Riedemann of Aid to the Church in Need, responding that perhaps the most immediate concern

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is famine. According to the United Nations, just over 30 percent of West Africa's economy is agricultural, providing the largest source of income and livelihood for 70 to 80 percent of the population. The majority of Internally Displaced Persons are from these rural communities are farmers, chased off their land by attacks from Islamist militants and terror groups. The impact of the violence is not only the destruction of infrastructure, the loss of livestock and the displacement of farmers from their farms, but moreover – due to the insecurity – their inability to return to harvest. Combined with the increases in food prices resulting from the COVID 19 pandemic, these portend a near future man-made famine in many of these countries

***Threatened with Death***

Then there is Afordia, a Nigerian Christian health care worker whose husband was executed by Boko Haram. After cutting off the communication networks in the couple's village, the extremists rounded up the men and asked each one if they were a Muslim or an infidel.

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“No, I am not an infidel or a Muslim, I am a Christian,’ my husband told them,” She said. “Then he knelt down on the side of the road and prayed.”

*Bad News in a Fallen People*

The bad news is not just ‘out there.’ Each of us, as members of this fallen world, commits sins. We confessed them earlier – what we have done in thought, word, and deed – against our neighbors and against God himself - both by our action and our inaction.

Luther drove himself and his Father Confessor to distraction trying to remember and confess all his known sins. He and his contemporaries soon realized that a complete enumeration of sins is impossible and that one's confidence of forgiveness is NOT to be based on the sincerity of one's contrition nor on one's doing works of satisfaction imposed by the confessor (penance), but on the sure promise of a faithful God.

*Good News for a Fallen World*

Enough bad news – lets focus on the good news. Christ works through His people to work toward the restoration of a fallen world. Throughout the past two millennium, Christians have responded to calamity by

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running toward the problem, not away from it, by establishing hospitals and providing relief after natural disasters. They have worked through and even in extreme cases in opposition to the governmental rulers and authorities that have been established by God to provide for the common good. They led reform movements that abolished slavery, fought in just wars against evil, and worked for the recognition that all people are made in image of God, both born and unborn, male and female, without respect to race or caste. Individual Christians have served honorably in political, military, and public service vocations, being faithful to the calling the God has given them. Over the centuries, Christians have worked diligently to understand God's creation in all fields of scientific study and used their creative power to invent new and better ways to follow God's direction in Genesis (1:28) to "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." Finally, when faced with death, Christians often remember the words of the St. Steven, the first Christian martyr, who said "Lord, do not hold this sin against them."

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*Good News for a Fallen People*

This is where it begins to get personal, as in the person and work of Jesus. This is not only New Year's Eve, but the 7<sup>th</sup> day of Christmas; that time between December 25<sup>th</sup> and Epiphany on January 6<sup>th</sup>. What did Jesus do that merits our attention?

First, because He was God incarnate, He was able to live a holy, sinless life, faithfully following the commandments of His Father in Heaven.

Second, He spent time with people, especially those twelve that we call Apostles, laying the foundation for His kingdom and training up disciples – followers – who would be equipped and enabled to carry on His mission after His ascension to Heaven.

Third, He was willingly obedient to His Father's wishes, even death on a cross, where He bled and died on account of your sins and mine. That sacrifice of a pure, holy, and innocent man was the necessary payment required by God's justice to cover the sins of the whole world – everyone who has lived, is living, or will live in the future.

Lastly, He demonstrated His power over the corruption of His creation by death and the devil through His resurrection from the dead.

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*Good News for Us*

So, what are the benefits of Jesus's work? (1) A restored relationship with our Creator, (2) eternal life in Heaven with God (as opposed to eternal separation from Him in Hell), and (3) the peace and comfort that we can have when dealing with the consequences of living in a fallen world – trouble, calamity, persecution, hunger, and the like.

God created a very tangible world, and He works through His creation to apply these benefits to us. He uses water and the word to baptize us and call us into relationship with Him. He uses the actions and words of those around us to provide for our physical, emotional, and spiritual needs. His word, spoken, and heard, nourishes our spirits, and deepens our relationship with Him. Likewise, He feeds us with His very body and blood, tangibly giving us His forgiveness.

And all this He does as a pure gift, without any worthiness or merit on our part. Let us thank and praise Him for what He has done and what He will do with and through us during the new year as we continue to join Him on His mission.

AMEN