



In the Hands of the Refiner

Thoughts for the New Year:

Do not Resent. Do not React.

So, New Year's Eve has come and gone, and we have brought in the new year 2021. We look back at 2020, and say to ourselves, "what a horrible year that was." COVID-19, illness, death, separation from family, no school, no church for almost six months, livestreaming, fear, trepidation, and angst. Through it all we have tried to maintain. Maintain with faith during this past 10 months. We've had to be creative, and we've had to be resilient. I remember the Clint Eastwood movie called "Heartbreak Ridge." There was a three-fold axiom that the Gunnery Sergeant said to his commanding officer and his Marines, it was, "A Marine must adapt, improvise, and overcome." I thought about that a lot this year. How was I going to lead Christ Lutheran Church through this pandemic, keeping them engaged with each other, with the Word of God and the Sacraments. I had to adapt, improvise, and overcome, if we were going to thrive during the pandemic and beyond. I am still thinking about this axiom as we move forward into 2021.

The political atmosphere has been some kind of a challenge as well. The picture that many see or rather I see, is a country in the balance – which way is the United States going to go? It is almost as frightening as it is confusing. Then there is the question of vaccines – are they going to work or not? Will the vaccines be effective or will the side effects be debilitating? The questions run on and on.

So, how do I segue into my thoughts about two very old and wise principles for those of you that I am writing to? Well, the two principles are *do not resent* and *do no react*. I have not been very successful in implementing these principles my life. However, I am not giving up on these words of wisdom. For 2021 I want to recall and apply them to my life each day. I pray the Lord to remind me of them always. I pray that they resonate with you in your Christian walk, and that you can apply them to your life as well. Life is for learning, and we must want to learn from the Lord.

There are two spiritual principles, or disciplines, that summarize Christian spiritual wisdom. They are disciplines every single one of us can practice, no matter where we are in life – whether we're at home or in school; whether we're housewives or retired; whether we've got a job or we've got little kids to run after. If we can hold on to and exercise these two principles, we will be able to go deeper and deeper in our spiritual life. Let's go deeper together!

Do Not Resent

When we look at all the inner clutter that is in our lives, hearts and souls, what do we find? We find resentments. They're in there. We find remembrance of wrongs. We find self-justifications. We find these in ourselves because of pride. It is pride that makes us hold on to our justifications for our continued anger against other people. It is hurt pride, or arrogance, which feeds our envy and jealousy. Envy and jealousy lead to resentment.

Resentfulness leads to a host of problems. The more resentful we are of other people, the more depressed we become. The more we are consumed with the desire to have what they have; it turns into avarice. Often, we'll then engage in the addictive use of the substance of the material world – whether it's food or alcohol or drugs or sex or some other thing –to medicate ourselves into forgetfulness and to distract ourselves from our resentments.

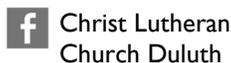
One of the most valuable and important things that we can do is look at all of the resentments that we have. One of the best ways of accomplishing this is to make *a life confession*. Not just once, before we're baptized. However, during the course of our spiritual life, we may make several life confessions, in order to really dig in to our past and look at these resentments that we bear against other people. This will enable us to do the difficult work that it takes to overcome these resentments through forgiveness.

Christ Lutheran Church

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President: Ouitdee Carson
V.P.: Carolyn Lofald
Treasurer: Sandy Carlson

Every Month:

Wednesdays:
4 PM Confirmation
5 PM Youth Bible Study
6:30 PM Adult Bible Study

Mary Circle
First Thursday of each month
at 9:30 AM (Postponed until
further notice)

Esther Circle
First Thursday of each month
at 10:00 AM

Dorcas Circle
Second Tuesday of each
month at 1:00 PM (Postponed
until further notice)

Lutherans for Life
Second Sunday of each month
at 6:30 PM (Postponed until
further notice)

Council Meeting
Second Thursday of each
month at 6:30 PM

What does forgiveness mean? Forgiveness does not mean excusing or justifying the actions of somebody. For example, saying “Oh, he abused me but that’s O.K., that’s just his nature,” or “I deserved it.” No, if somebody abused you that was a sin against you.

When we hold resentments, when we hold anger and bitterness within ourselves against those who have abused us in some way, we take their abuse and we continue it against ourselves. We have to stop that cycle. Hebrews 12:15 exhorts us, “See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled.”

Maybe that person has long gone and long forgotten me, forgotten that I even existed. Maybe not. Maybe it was a parent or someone else close, which makes the resentment all the more bitter. For the sake of our own soul and for the sake of our own peace, we need to forgive. We should not justify the action, rather we should overlook the action and see that there’s a person there who is struggling with sin. We should see that the person we have resented, the person we need to forgive, is no different than we are, that they sin just like we do and we sin just like they do.

Of course, it helps if the person whom we resent, the person who offended us or abused us in some way, asks forgiveness of us. However, we can’t wait for this. We can’t hold onto our resentments even after outwardly saying we’ve forgiven. Think of the Lord’s Prayer: “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” If we don’t forgive, we can’t even pray the Lord’s Prayer without condemning ourselves. We condemn ourselves by refusing to forgive. It’s not that God condemns us.

1 John 3:19-22, “This is how we will know that we belong to the truth and will reassure our hearts before Him whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and He knows all things. Dear friends, if our hearts don’t condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive whatever we ask from Him because we keep His commands and do what is pleasing in his sight.”

We will never have peace if we don’t forgive, only resentment. It is one of the hardest things to do, and our culture does not understand it. It can be a hard thing to do as well. That is no excuse. It is to look at the person we need to forgive, and to love them – despite how they may have sinned against us. Their sin is their sin, and they have to deal with it themselves. We can sin by our reaction against their sin.

Do Not React

So, the first spiritual principle – *do not resent* – leads to the second. We must learn to *not react*. This is just like “turn the other cheek.” When somebody says something hurtful, or somebody does something hurtful, what is it that’s being hurt? It’s our ego. 1 Peter 5:5b-6, “God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Therefore, humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time.”

If we seriously think about it, nobody can truly hurt us. They might cause some physical pain, or emotional pain. They might even kill our body. Nobody can hurt our true selves. I have to take responsibility for my own reactions so I can control them.

There are a number of different levels to this principle. On the most blatant level, if someone hits you don’t hit them back. Turn the other cheek – that’s the Lord’s teaching. Now, this is hard enough. There is a deeper level still. Because if somebody hits you, and you don’t hit them back – and you resent them because of it, and you bear anger and hatred and bitterness against them, you’ve lost. You have still sinned. You have still broken your relationship with God, because you bear that anger in your heart.

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One of the things which is so difficult to come to terms with is the reality that when we bear anger and resentment and bitterness in our hearts, we erect barriers to God's grace within ourselves. It's not that God stops giving us His grace. It's that we say, "No. I don't want it."

What is God's grace? It is His love, His mercy, His compassion, His activity in our lives. The early church fathers tell us that each and every human person who has ever been born on this earth bears the image of God which sin can distort.

Human beings have a fallen nature. The implication of this truth is that we have no excuses for our sins. Even though we have a fallen nature, we are responsible for our sins, for the choices we make. We are responsible for our actions, and our reactions. "The devil made me do it" is no excuse, because the devil has no more power over us than we give him or that God allows. This is hard to accept, because it is really convenient to blame the devil. It is also really convenient to blame the other person, or our past. It is also a lie. Our choices are our own.

On an even deeper level, the spiritual principle – *do not react* – teaches us that we need to learn to not react to thoughts. One of the fundamental aspects of this is inner watchfulness or awareness. This may seem like a daunting task, considering how many thoughts we have. However, our watchfulness does not need to be focused on our thoughts. Our watchfulness needs to be focused on God. We need to maintain the conscious awareness of God's presence. If we can maintain the conscious awareness of His presence, our thoughts will have no power over us.

We can, to paraphrase St. Benedict, dash our thoughts against the presence of God. This is a very ancient patristic (early church fathers) teaching. We focus our attention on the presence of God. If we can do that, we will begin to control our troubling thoughts. Our reactions are about our thoughts. After all, if someone says something nasty to us, how are we reacting? We react first through our thinking, our thoughts. Perhaps you're habitually accustomed to just lashing out after taking offense with some kind of nasty response of your own. Keeping watch over our minds so that we maintain that living communion with God leaves no room for distracting thoughts. It leaves plenty of room if we decide we need to *think something through intentionally* in the presence of God. That is very important. However, as soon as we engage in something hateful, we shut God out. We feel miserable. We tune out. We leave the building.

The reverse is true – as long as we maintain our connection to God, we won't be capable of engaging in something hateful. We won't react. We feel stable. We tune in. We enter into His rest.

How do I maintain my connection with God? Prayer. Having open, honest conversation with God. Philippians 5:17 says to "pray without ceasing." How do I pray without ceasing? Well, I learned a simple prayer many years ago, called the "Jesus Prayer." It goes like this, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me, a sinner." This prayer, when repeated at any time during the day, while you are doing anything, can bring your heart connection with God to a greater reality. When you sin, say this prayer. When you want to pray for someone else, say this simple prayer and at the end add "have mercy upon John" or "heal John of cancer" or "protect John's family." It is so simple, however, it is so powerful. It is a means for entering into deeper and deeper conscious communion with God. It is a means for us to acquire and maintain the awareness of the presence of God in our daily lives.

Therefore, with a constant attitude of prayer, coming from the heart, with a continual awareness of the presence of God, we can resist the temptations to resent and react.

Remember 1 John 3:11-18, "For this is the message you have heard from the beginning: We should love one another, unlike Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brothers were righteous. Do not be surprised, brothers and sisters, if the world hates you. We know that we have passed from death to life because we love our brothers and sisters. The one who does not love remains in death. Everyone who hates his brother or sister is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him. This is how we have come to know love: He laid down his life for us. We should also lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has this world's goods and sees a fellow believer in need but withholds compassion from him-how does God's love reside in him? Little children, let us not love in word or speech, but in action and in truth."

God bless you all this New Year 2021!

Your Pastor,

Gary +

January Maintenance Report

Hoping everyone had a wonderful Christmas and a Happy New Year also! Perrault Construction has completed the job of re-siding the area where the old gas meter used to be. It looks very nice. They used the same vinyl siding we have in other areas of the exterior so everything matches. Thankful this is now complete as this is the area where families would drive up for the Food Share. Gary, our custodian, has been keeping busy with cleaning and disinfecting for us. He continues to be conscientious about our church and our health. He has also been busy polishing the kick plates in the basement so they shine! We were noting that the sanctuary was not as warm as it should be with the thermostats set higher. The Boiler technicians were out and noted that we had three zone valves that have failed. We have those on order and they will be installed soon. The valves have been placed in an open position to override the thermostats so we continue to have good heat. We do have a service agreement with them so that helps with the cost of parts. Gary also noted a leak coming from one of the elbows of the center area radiator in Fellowship Hall. We will have the technicians take a look at this when they come for our repairs. We currently have a pan under that area to catch the drips. Our heated slab continues to work well and so does the heat tape on the roof over the front entry. No icicles! We are still waiting for the window repairs to be completed at the parsonage. We will send another reminder to Arrowhead. We also have one window in the sanctuary that needs some attention and I keep that on Perrault's radar. Thanking Jim again for helping to clear the snow. It's kind of feeling like spring here lately so we can be out and enjoy our walks in the woods! The plus with wearing the masks is that it keeps our faces warm when the wind is whirling! ☺

In Christ,

Carolyn

*Thank
you!*

We received so many notes of thanks from the teachers at Piedmont Elementary for the Christmas gift that was sent. They truly appreciated the church's kindness in thinking of them.

To Christ Lutheran Church,

Thank you so much for the Super One gift card. I appreciate your thinking of me at Christmas time. I'm looking forward to heading into a new year, God has graciously given us another free trip around the sun! Enjoy the ride!

Judi Morgan

Sunday services are still livestreamed on our Facebook page:

Christ Lutheran Church Duluth at 9:30 AM

You can also log onto our website clcduluth.org



Christ Lutheran Church Duluth



Christ Lutheran Church Duluth



Dear Church Family,

I certainly was surprised when my doorbell rang and there was Mark Wiita with a pretty red bag of Christmas cheer. I certainly did not expect it. Thank you so much & thanks to all that worked to make Christmas special for all of us that can't get out.

Christmas blessings to all.

Love,

Carol Schneeberger

Dear Christ Lutheran,

What a surprise! We enjoy the poinsettia and tasty cookies. We miss baking cookies at church, too. Christ Lutheran is such a caring and loving church.

It is difficult not attending church in our lovely sanctuary. Thankfully we can get the service online.

Priscilla's recent tests with her pulmonary specialist were very good. Praise God!

Let's all be safe and may the vaccine make 2021 a better year. Thanks again. Peace to you all.

In Christ's love,

Don & Priscilla

Thank you for the plant and cookies.

Lowaine & Chuck Morris

Dear Christ Lutheran Church,

We want to thank our new church family for the nice Christmas gift. The cookies are a real treat. Because we are seniors, and have 2 daughters in the medical field who insist we stay home safe we have not been able to attend church in the sanctuary. We so appreciate the live feed. We wish everyone a Merry Christmas and we pray for all to have a New Year full of blessings.

Yours in Christ,

Marsile and Carol

To Christ Lutheran Church,

I want to thank everyone for the nice poinsettia & Christmas cookies—they are yummy.

I miss coming to church & seeing the Pastor & everyone. Hopefully I'll be back soon.

Merry Christmas to all & God bless everyone.

Love,

Carol Johnson

Thank you also for the prayers & reading material from church.

Dear Christ Lutheran Friends,

Barb and I would like to thank you for the gracious gifts delivered to our door. The poinsettia brightened up our house, the cookies were delicious, and the devotionals were very much appreciated as well.

We thank you for keeping us in your prayers, especially as we celebrate the miracle of Christmas.

Many blessings to you all in the New Year!

Bob and Barb Johnson

Dear Friends,

Thank you for remembering me during the Christmas season.

I was surprised to receive the church gift bag. God bless you all.

Love in Christ,

Vi Boder

Dear CLC Family and Friends,

GOD'S WORD TRANSFORMS US!

Spiritual transformation is the amazing process of Christ being formed in us. This transformation relies on a beautiful blend of God's grace, the work of the Holy Spirit, the power of God's Word, the faithfulness of Christian ministers and mentors, and our responsiveness and cooperation.

God instructs us to be diligent in our Bible study to "rightly divide the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15), and we need to apply sound rules for interpreting scripture in our personal devotions and in group studies. In *Knowing Scripture*, R.C. Sproul offers eleven practical rules for interpreting Scripture that are helpful for all Christians. They are paraphrased below with some explanation and examples. You may already know and apply some of these rules as you study the Bible, or this may be a new theological adventure for you.

1) Read passionately and personally! Each time you open the Holy Scriptures you are invited to commune with God, to enjoy His presence as you receive from Him in a life-changing way. The Spirit of Truth, the Holy Spirit, is near with wisdom and understanding. When you have a question, ask God. Express your thanks and praise, contrition, and need.

2) What biblical literary form are you reading? Is this a letter, genealogy, history, or law? If so, you are reading factual prose with limited symbolism, but watch for figures of speech. Parables, poetry, psalms, prophecy, and proverbs rely on more symbolism and imagery to communicate a rich, layered message.

3) Are you reading a record of events or an explanation about events? For example, the Gospels record many historical events and direct quotes from Jesus. Paul's letters often provide theological understanding and application of Gospel events and teaching.

4) The explicit guides the implicit. Explicit means stated openly, obvious, and clear. Implicit includes the symbolic, poetic, subtle, and mysterious. Jesus often follows a parable with clear instruction on what the symbols mean. See Matthew 13:3-23, the parable of the sower.

5) Take time to determine what the words mean. Start your Bible reading and devotions with this prayer, "Father in heaven, help me understand the meaning of what you have written." Take care with the approach, "what does this verse mean to me?" Use a sound Bible translation rather than a paraphrase. Have an English dictionary nearby and consider downloading a helpful Bible app (for example, esword.net or blueletterbible.org). Context influences meaning, so read before and after a verse or read the whole chapter. Note when you see the word "therefore" because what came before is key to the meaning.

6) Pay attention to parallelism often found in Proverbs and the prophetic books; there are three kinds. 1) Two or more statements that are similar (Proverbs 19:5), 2) two or more statements that contrast (Proverbs 13:1), and 3) Two or more statements that are like a staircase either increasing or decreasing a concept (Psalm 92:9).

7) Are you reading a proverb or a law? A proverb is wise advice, but does not carry the weight of a law; for example, the Ten Commandments. On the other hand, God's laws are moral absolutes.

8) Recognize the difference between the spirit of the law and the letter of the law. The Pharisees upheld the letter of the law, and they added burdens to the law that God did not require, but they were blind to the spirit of the law. In Matthew 5:21-22, Jesus recalls the letter of the 6th commandment, thou shalt not murder. Then He points out that anger, hatred, and cursing break the spirit of the 6th commandment as well.

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9) Take care with parables. Look for the central meaning of a parable. Remember that Jesus both revealed and concealed truth in parables. See Matthew 13:10-11; Then the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do you speak to them in parables?" And He answered them, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given."

10) Take care with predictive prophecy. Predictive prophecy can be partially fulfilled over multiple periods of time and may have different applications. Some prophecies relate exclusively to specific events, such as those that fulfilled in Christ. Other prophecies culminate at the end of the age which is yet to come. Be cautious about looking for prophetic fulfillment in current events. Rather, in Biblical prophecy look for the message of repentance, how is Christ being revealed and glorified, how is God's holiness, righteousness, and sovereignty being displayed, and what is your response?

11) Read with a spirit of humility. Ask God to help you.

Let's Dig into God's Word Together in 2021!

CONFIRMATION CLASS ONLINE WEDNESDAYS AT 4 PM WITH PASTOR GARY

CLC YOUTH BIBLE STUDY WEDNESDAYS AT 5 PM WITH SUE

We're studying the Book of Romans at the parsonage! Invite a friend :)

ALL CHURCH BIBLE STUDY WEDNESDAYS AT 6:30PM

Join Pastor Gary in Fellowship Hall to study the awe-inspiring Book of Revelation!

WOMEN'S WORD & PRAYER FRIDAYS AT 9AM WITH SUE

Starting 1/15/21, all women are invited to grow in faith and prayer together. The devotional Bible study "Beloved Apprentice" will be provided. We will meet in Fellowship Hall each week. Think about inviting a friend. Refreshments provided. Call 320-815-1561 with questions.

CLC FOOD SHARE

Thank you for your generous donations and volunteer service for the CLC Food Share in 2020! We will continue sharing groceries with school district families the third Wednesday of every month. January grocery packing will be Tuesday 1/19/21 at 6:30pm. Food share distribution is Wednesday 1/20/21 from 11:30am - 12:30pm.

PHOENIX TRIP

We are preparing for our 2,000 mile return drive tomorrow, and we are so thankful for this time of refreshing in the Arizona desert! We have enjoyed friends and family, the beauty of Flagstaff and Sedona, and the incredible artistic talent displayed in the museums and galleries of Scottsdale. It has been a special gift to set aside the burdens of 2020 and rest in God's goodness. Thank you for all the ways you bless us as we live and serve among you in Duluth! We're coming home!

See you soon and often in 2021,

Sue

320-815-1561

suedesha@gmail.com





Our sympathies to the family and friends of Orien Olson who passed away on January 1 at Edgewood Vista in Hermantown, MN. Cards of sympathy may be sent to Orien Olson's family in care of:

Williams Lobermeier Funeral Home
3208 W 3rd St
Duluth MN 55806

Our Sympathies to the family and friends of Bryan Goeppinger who passed away on November 28, 2020 in Hermantown, Minnesota. His funeral was on December 11. The address is for Eric and Randi Goeppinger, Bryan's son:

612 Watkins St.
Mora, MN 55051

Our Sympathies to the family and friends of Olivia Schadel who passed away in December.

Our sympathies to the family and friends of Mary Jane Johnson who passed away on Sunday, December 13 in Virginia, Minnesota. Mary Jane had been a faithful member of Christ Lutheran Church for many years. Her family is planning a memorial service for her in the summer. Cards may be sent to Mary Jane's daughter, Debbie:

Debbie Johnson
P O Box 1113
Bemidji MN 56619

Our sympathies to the family of Bill VanCalbergh who passed away on December 29 at his home in Florida. Cards may be sent to:

Mary Ellen Vongillern
66 Seasons Dr
Punta Gorda FL 33983

Financial Update

November 2020 Income \$11,423.24 November Expenses \$9,576.30

Monthly income was over expenses by \$1,846.94

YTD Income \$138,382.17 YTD Expenses \$163,317.57

YTD income under expenses by \$24,935.40

Adjusted YTD income (PPL): Income \$2464.60 over expenses

November Mission: AALC—\$994.00

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Matthew 6:21

PLEASE PRAY FOR....

*Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.
James 5:14*

Our Pastor & the Leadership of the Church
All of our students from pre-school to college
Mission of the Month: The AALC
Our Country, Military & Police
The teachers and students at all schools
Persecuted Christians throughout the world
Piedmont Elementary
The steadfastness of our faith

For those who have recently lost loved ones:
The family of Orien Olson
The family of Bryan Goepfinger
The family of Olivia Schadel
The family of Mary Jane Johnson
The family of Bill VanCalbergh

THOSE WITH HEALTH NEEDS:

Vi Boder	Jane McLean	Ruth Peterson
Bob Johnson	Jean Sundstrom	Ruth Dahl
Mary Jenny	Katie Lund	Carol Schramm
Kathy Stevens	Susan Johnson	Florence Kubiak
Tom & Marlene Stauber	Judy Stocke	Evelyn Johnson
Diane Malander	Carol Johnson	Eli Miletich
Dennis Peterson	Carol Sogard	Donna Swanson & Family
Mark Malander	Barb Hanson	Darlene Saaf
Don & Laviere Johnson	Brian MacDonald	Del Sandberg
Norma Johnson	Yvonne Terry	

If there are any people who have been accidently overlooked, please contact the church office. We apologize for any oversights.

Happy Birthday!

<i>Jean Clark January 4</i>	<i>Mike Pickar January 15</i>
<i>Barb Johnson January 7</i>	<i>Wendy Pickar January 17</i>
<i>Pastor Gary January 10</i>	<i>Courtney Carson January 19</i>
<i>Dale Lund January 14</i>	<i>Gabe Wiita January 22</i>

All the days ordained for me were written in your book, before one of them came to be.

*How precious to me are your thoughts, O God!
How vast is the sum of them!*

Psalm 139:16,17