

Obviously we can't live in the past, but we can live from the past. We enjoy and appreciate many things from the past, and particularly during the Advent season we rejoice in what God has done in the past, particularly that He loved the world and sent His Son Jesus to be our Savior. We rejoice that He kept His promises from the past so that in the present we can enjoy the forgiveness of our sins and count on Him to be our Refuge and Strength, especially when so many changing and challenging times are upon us.

So we are always living in the present, and we can always be living with confidence and courage as we face each new day, each challenging change, because we know that the Lord is with us and somehow He is able to make all things work together for the good of those who love Him. And we are able to have joy and peace with our believing because of what the Lord has done, continues to do for us.

Consequently, on the basis of what God has done for us in the past, is doing for us in the present, we can face the future with hope no matter how unknown and unsettling it might be. He who came to be our Savior centuries ago is our Good Shepherd through all of time and will take us into eternity and heaven in the future. God's mercy and grace surround past, present and future.

An Advent hymn that beautifully connects the **past, present** and **future**:  
ONCE HE CAME IN BLESSING.

*Once He came in blessing, All our sins redressing; Came in likeness lowly,  
Son of God most holy; Bore the cross to save us; Hope and freedom gave us.*

*Now He gently leads us; With Himself He feeds us Precious food from heaven;  
Pledge of peace here given, Manna that will nourish Souls that they may flourish.*

*Soon will come that hour – When with mighty power Christ will come in splendor  
And will judgment render, With the faithful sharing Joy beyond comparing.*

*Come, then, O Lord Jesus, From our sins release us. Keep our hearts believing,  
That we, grace receiving, Ever may confess You, Till in heaven we bless You.*

Past, present and future. The Lord our God has it all covered, all under control, and we can be assured that we are always under His care in time for eternity. He will never leave us nor forsake us. - - - With the pandemic continuing, I will continue with these devotional letters and do personally what is safe and what I am able.

Peace and blessings from the past, in the present and for the future, Pastor Lemke

'**WHEN WILL THERE BE GOOD NEWS?**' happens to be the title of a novel that I thought fit the times in which we live. It is a strange novel about some strange and difficult times in the character's lives. In a sense the question is not too different from real time and real life these days. We all wonder "**when there will be good news**" for us about life and living in general and about a number of things specific to us. When will the corona virus pandemic quit? When will the vaccine be available to us in our community? When will the cancer I have be curbed or cured? When will communities be able to live in peace and harmony? When will my kids or grand kids be able to get a job? And that list goes on with a variety of concerns personal to each of us. These are troubling times and we wonder **WHEN WILL THERE BE GOOD NEWS?**

As we look back in history there have been many times when people have waited for **good news**. Some of you might have waited for a letter from someone in the military serving in a war zone, or a family member a distance away dealing with a possible dilemma. You have waited for **good news**, and when it came you rejoiced. - -The children of Israel waited for **good news** about deliverance from bondage and slavery in Egypt and later while in captivity in Babylon, and generally for news of the promised "Savior" to come. The waiting was often long and hard. Through the centuries God sent prophets with **good news** for their present and future, and finally when the time was just right "God sent forth His son, born of a woman, born under the law to redeem from the curse of the law." The angels brought the **good news**, tidings of great joy for all.

During this Advent season we are once again reminded of the **Good News** delivered by God through the prophets, and in Person through His Son, that all who believe in Him will not perish but have eternal life. As the angels made their announcement of **GOOD NEWS** to the shepherds outside Bethlehem it was **good news** not just for their time, but for our time and all time as well. They rushed in to see the **Good News** made flesh, and found He was for real. God had kept His word. The Christ was born.

Yes, that was the **Good News** they were waiting for. That is the **Good News** we have to cherish and hold dear in our hearts in the midst of the strange, challenging and unsettling times in which we live. God has kept His Word, and we are reassured that God keeps His Word and promises to us for us in this 21<sup>st</sup> Century. We don't have to wait. We already know and have the **Good News** that God has and continues to love us and the world, having given His Son to be our Savior from sin, a very present help to us in these troubling and unsettled times, and an eternal Savior.

I wish you the full joy of the **GOOD NEWS: "CHRIST IS BORN."**

Merry Christmas, Pastor Lemke

TIME – Sometimes it seems to go too fast and at other times it goes to slow. We sometimes mark time by births and deaths, by victories or defeats, using the phrase “remember when.” There are also graduations and weddings and anniversaries by which we calculate or mark time. Each of us probably has a number of events which we refer to by which we mark time.

When we were little we used to reference time by saying: “I’m almost four,” even though we just turned three.” Then at 18 or 21, “I’m an adult now.” We were a little more ambiguous at middle age, “Just over 40.” As the years passed and “older age” took hold of us, we somehow became more proud of the years we lived, “I’m long into retirement,” or, “I’ll be turning 90 soon,” even though we might be only 85.

Maybe you remember the hymn with the line: “Time, like an ever rolling stream, bears all it’s sons away.” Or the phrase: “Time marches on.” Or a pop song about “Time in a Bottle.” Or the advice: “Make good use of your time...Don’t waste your time.”

As we conclude another year and move into a new one, we realize both how elusive and also concrete time is, and remember how so many things have changed in our society, family structures, and personal relationships with Corona Virus running rampant. We have come to grief with the loss of people close to us, and we have come to appreciate new individuals who have come into our lives with special care giving and loving actions. There have been gains and losses, some we appreciate and some we regret.

Sometimes I hear people reference time from the point: “I don’t have much time left.” At other instances: “I have too much time on my hands.” Time is different for all of us because we all live in different circumstances.

No matter how elusive time might sometimes be, as we have marked time with another Christmas gone past, and will mark another new year at midnight on December 31, we can take comfort saying “My times are in Thy hands” in reference that we are not alone in time. The One who created time holds all things in His hands, holds us in His hands, and “just at the right time” sent His son into time to be our Savior. And this Savior has also promised to send His Spirit, the Comforter, to be with us and in us during time to help handle the times. So He is with us all the time. Jesus promised: “I will be with you always to the close of the age.” And, He has washed all our sins from past times away so they need not haunt us, is with us every day of the present, and is preparing a place for us with Him beyond time in heaven. So the hymn “Our God our help in ages past, our hope for years to come” offers the phrase: “Our shelter from the stormy blast and our eternal home.” And we are comforted.

We rejoice in the Biblical truth in reference to our loving God: “Thou art the same, thy years shall have no end.” We can count on Him every moment in time and need not fear the present or future. “My times are in Thy hands!”

As the Covid crisis continues, I will continue to do what I am able and permitted.

Lots of love and blessings to you now and in the New Year, Pastor Lemke

IF YOU SHOULD NEED TO CANCEL OR CHANGE THE APPOINTED TIME, PLEASE PHONE MY CELL NUMBER AND SPEAK TO ME DIRECTLY or phone the church office.