

## BEHOLD I MAKE ALL THINGS NEW

Why shouldn't we wish others happiness—greet one another with the words, "A Happy New Year?" Many people think of happiness as continuous, uninterrupted well being or pleasure. Absence of any concerns. Instant gratification. The very first aspect of happiness, real happiness, I would have to emphasize, is acceptance of the imperfections of life... Those who hold in their hand the true coin on whose face happiness is indelibly stamped, know that always on the other side of that coin is the insignia of responsibility.

Rabbi Herbert Bronstein

*Scripture:*

Revelation 21

*I make all things new*

1. Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.
2. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband;
3. and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling of God is with humans. The Lord will dwell with them, and they shall be God's people, and God himself will be with them;
4. God will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away."
5. And he who sat upon the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." Also he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true."
6. And he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the fountain of the water of life without payment.



### THEMES OF A YEAR NOW ENDING

As the year ends this weekend, I have been thinking about some of the themes that our church and our world have had to deal with this year. I have been helped by television year-end reviews, and the non-stop reporting of the death of Saddam Hussein just yesterday. My feelings about his death are somewhat like our memories at the end of the year. It is a moment of resolution. Even with the flaws in the trial, he was treated more fairly than he treated the people who were executed at his command, including his own relatives. And yet, there is no joy in one more tragedy. Even revenge is not very satisfying. We have to start with higher

principles than revenge and punishment if we are to create a world that is satisfying to live in.

### SYMBOLS OF A YEAR IN THE LIFE

Our church has been involved in the life of our city, neighborhoods, and individuals. We have sought variety, balance and quality in our worship and education programs. We have tried to be responsive to the needs of our members, and to be a light of hope in our community. We continue to ask, "What is the kind of church we want to be?"

We have approached certainties with questions. And where life has presented us with problems, we have responded with a quest for the timeless certainties.

I have asked Kelli Upshaw to draw some symbols on this white board to represent some of the aspects of the life of our community that we have observed in the last year.

**(SYMBOL – CHURCH CROSS)**



Let's start with the Christian year. We have sung about, prayed about, and preached about the church year. There have been seasonal events such as Lent, Easter, Advent, Christmas, springtime and harvest. For those religious celebrations, ceremonies and memories, let us use the symbol of the cross.

**(SYMBOL – STICK FIGURE)**



Our year was also marked by personal events such as births, weddings, funerals, graduations, travel, sickness and health, richer and poorer. You and I intersected with God at new junctions of life. It seems that as soon as we think we have one thing figured out, there is another puzzle to solve. For these personal spiritual memories, for our own triumphs and disappointments, let's use a stick figure of a person. We remember the lessons God has provided us in this year.

**(SYMBOL – A ROSE)**



This has been another year in which our church has been involved with local events. The planting and the harvest seasons have spiritual meaning when you live in the wine country. We are involved in ministries to the homeless, gifts to children and families at Christmas, foodbags are provided each week for the hungry. Music is one of our gifts to our community; we prepare meals for students, and provide education for preschool families. And so let's use the symbol of a rose to remember another year of involvement in our community.

**(SYMBOL – GLOBE)**



We are also a church involved in the world. We are a church of travelers, and that is a deep interest of my own. We study national and international events. We have learned more

about the history of European culture in the American West. We pray about Iraq, and soldiers and Saddam Hussein. We pray for solutions in the Middle East, in Darfur, relief for the victims of a Tsunami, and victims of a hurricane in our own country. And so let's draw a globe to remember a restless and violent year in the life of our planet. And let's put the international space station above that to remind us that there will be a time when we leave our globe, just as sailors left their native lands in search of new worlds.

**A FRAME OF FAITH, FRIENDS, FAMILY**

Now how about putting a frame around that, Kelli, to symbolize the portrait of a year that ends – at least on our calendars – tonight.

Tonight people will celebrate, and tomorrow we start the year with a clean slate. So with the New Year I would like to wipe the slate clean.

The scriptures say:

7. Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.

Psalms 51

**NOW LET'S ERASE THE YEAR THAT IS ENDING.**

So let's erase the white board.

There is problem with the white board. It does not completely erase.

Kelli, did you use a permanent marker by mistake?

There must be a lesson in that, too.

**We can't completely erase the good memories, and we can't completely obliterate the mistakes.**

We have done some things that the Lord has told us not to do. We have omitted things that we could have done. We have received both the praise and the criticism of others. Time will help us deal with it, but we can never wipe out the past completely. So we begin the New Year with a few stains.

In the Bible, God said, "Even though you wash yourself with a lot of soap, the stain of your guilt is still there."

We must have God's forgiveness to take away those stains -- and we can have God's forgiveness because of Jesus.

### **SO WE WILL HAVE TO ADJUST OUR FORMULA**

Each year we begin with a clean slate, but there are stains upon it. And for the stains that we cannot remove, we need not only an eraser, but also forgiveness.

The people asked Peter, "What shall we do?"

38. Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.
39. The promise is for you and your children.

The Book of Acts

So our starting point is a somewhat clean slate, together with the greatest tool of our faith, forgiveness.

That is the way we look ahead. Happy New Year.

1. Let us resolve to be faithful no matter what the year ahead may bring.
2. We are all afraid of something. But we will name it and move on. We will be driven by our hopes, not our fears.
3. Stay on track
4. Remain flexible and keep on going

### **NO INSURANCE**

But even that does not insure success.

Is there anything constant through all this?

Yes, a solid border - communities in which we live, the faith that we hold, and the love with which we surround ourselves. Faith, family and friends, that's the way we start another year. Kelli, draw us a border of crosses and stick figures.

Your life is significant at any age. Do not pretend to be small, and do not shrink away from

making a difference for good in the lives of others.

### **OUR DEEPEST FEAR**

by Marianne Williamson from *A Return To Love: Reflections on the Principles of A Course in Miracles*

"Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?"

Actually, who are you *not* to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone.

And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others."

**So let your light shine.  
The Lord will make all things new,  
and yet nothing that  
God has made is forgotten.  
Give yourself permission to shine,  
to love others, and  
to bring out the best in yourself,  
and in others.**

### **TWO PEOPLE LOOKING FOR HAPPINESS**

Rabbi Herbert Bronstein was Senior Rabbi of North Shore Congregation Israel in Glencoe, Illinois, where he is now Senior Scholar. He told this story of two people he met as part of his year end sermon to his synagogue.

"I set before you, for example, two persons in search of happiness:

On one side an elderly woman confined to a hospital room, practically immobile, in pain, gradually losing the faculty of sight, who has known personal loss of those dear to her. And on the other side a wealthy, successful young man in his physical prime, with family, with means to travel, means to enjoy a great life.

Which of the two would you say was the happier? ...At least in one case of which I know, you might have been mistaken.

Once I visited that elderly woman who spoke poetically in her hospital bed and appreciatively, with a kind of deep inner-feeling, of the light coming into her room towards the end of the day, of the colors of the flowers on the window counter, of her deep satisfaction with her life, of her pleasure in her loved ones, of her gratitude for my simple ordinary visit. Everything about her was positive. On the way out, with a wink and a smile, she got me at a weak moment to contribute to one of her favorite charities.

Later I stopped briefly at a social gathering where I met a young man in the prime of success and health, who had so magnified some alleged, imagined, or perhaps real trickery or chicanery on the part of business associates, that he had worked himself into a rancor of bitterness, making himself a very miserable person.

What I learned from these two people is that happiness accepts the imperfections of life, happiness comes from within."

## HAPPY NEW YEAR

And so with that reminder, I wish you "Happy New Year." May your happiness come from within. May it truly embrace your past with both gratitude and forgiveness, and may you discover, in the year ahead, a way to use the power that God has given you to liberate yourself from all fears, and liberate others from their fears as well.

Behold, I will make all things new.

In the name of our Lord and Savior. Amen.



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