

The Royal Poinciana Chapel

Sermon By

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"TWO THOUSAND TWO: WILL IT BE A NEW YEAR, OR JUST ANOTHER?"

Text: "And he who sat upon the heavenly throne said, 'Behold I make all things new!'"

Revelation 21:5

I want you to think about the question in our sermon topic here this morning, particularly with all the worrisome and sad things that happened around the globe in the year 2001: Will 2002 be a New Year for you, or just another of the same? I saw a cartoon in *The New Yorker Magazine*, most recent issue. The wife was speaking to her husband, a sour old Mr. Pottleby kind of soul. She said, "Standish, for once in your life, change you attitude! Try saying something positive about 2001." He crankily looked over top of his *Wall Street Journal* and replied, "It's almost over!"

It's almost over – more so now. Many people I know feel that way about the year Twenty Hundred One. Financial revenues dropping, income dwindling, one million Americans unemployed, a war which will not end, personal problems, etc. One good friend said to me two weeks ago, "Oh...Dr. Cromie, pray that nothing else happens to us this year." She had good reason for the prayer. And with the news at our house last night of Peggy's father's death, we all say amen.

I suppose there is a constant yearning deep inside of each of us to find something new. Maybe some new zest for living, some new joy in our occupation, some new excitement in our marriages or relationships, some change in present circumstances that would nudge us on, not only to a New Year, but to a new appreciation of who we are and all we long to be. I smiled the other day when a Health Page of Amazon.com came up on my computer screen.

It promised to deliver me "A Sound and Healthy Mind, Body and Soul." It was a featured e-mail piece titled "It's Time for a New You in 2002." No doubt it is. (I keep trying to improve myself every year.) But, wouldn't you know, item number one in the "New You 2002" was "Lose some weight." Oh dear. For \$18.20 they promise to send two helpful weight loss guide books: one called "New Body for Life," where you give up sweets, potatoes, starches and drinks. The other was called "Eight Minutes Every Morning," an exercise plan to keep my body fit and ready.

On down the page they offered me "A New You" in several other areas of my existence. For example: There were "37 Ways to Resolve, Restore, Reform, and Reinvent Myself." Items suggested were things like: pick up a new skill, learn to garden indoors, redecorate your car (I'm not quite certain how you would do that). But at Amazon.com/ecex/obodis/tg/feature they promise to tell you everything you need to know about it for \$6.95. Be a new you in 2002! It rhymes anyway.

I jest, a little anyway, but the passing of the years tends to do something to some people. The soul and enthusiasm can begin to age. A sadness begins to take over where joy used to live. They lose their confidence, and a caution that does not become a child of God takes over. They begin to grumble about almost everything they see. They become instant authorities on everything and pout when they don't get their way. Created in God's image, after his likeness, made to follow in

the footsteps of the Lord, supposedly carrying a great big sack of Christmas/New Year's love on our backs to dispense everywhere we go, they miss the mark by a million miles. They bumble around spreading gloom, emptying their psyches on anyone/everyone around, burdening other people, belittling other people, blasting other people. (Do you know what I mean?) I told you once, of the little girl who prayed the following prayer after church was over: "Dear God, please make the bad people good, but make the good people nice."

One thing, of many with Peggy's Dad, Melvin, even at 91 years and 364 days, faced with irreversible misfortunes of an aging body, he kept smiling as long as he could. Nurses, hospice people, nursing home cleaning women all remarked on his smile. My heavens, I know some people who haven't smiled for a generation or more. Loosen up. We are all in this together. It's trite but true to say that many things went downhill in 2001. Not only the September 11th disasters which shifted us all into a new course of reserve and caution, but with a new determination in more personal ways. Keeping one's spirit up in adversity is a battle.

So, you were all set for another twelve months, twelve months ago, to go here and there and to do this and that. All the plans were made to sit back and enjoy the ride, to rejoice at how level and smooth the road could be. Then one lash from the coachman's whip and good bye to all that you treasured. What the author of Proverbs understood so well when he warned, "Boast not about tomorrow; for you know not what a day may bring forth." Boast not about next year for you have to live in this. Boast not about the instant, for instantaneously it may all leave you and lead you into a dark dead-end.

That scene in Israel! How beautiful and lovely the fields must have looked, long furrowed lines stretching out as far as the eye could see – row after row of glorious flowing grain. And just as they were about to harvest, the plague of locust came to wipe it out. But with the plague, the

promise also came, simon-pure and guaranteed by God Himself: "I will restore to you the years the locust hath eaten." The Psalmist tells you that with considerable confidence. God promises to restore them to you; you will get them back somehow. So without a longing look at yesterday, but with the hope that when you make it up to the bend, something grand and gloriously new will be awaiting you, anxious to greet you when you arrive.

Hurry along now, not a shove, but a nudge. "Go and I will go with you. No, no. Go and I am already there. Before you lift that weary soul to mount the steps, I am standing at the top to help you up. Before you ever knock on the door, I am inside to let you in. Before you know what to ask, I have already answered."

Sure you have tumbled, maybe even been pushed. God bless you. But that is over too. Drag up those aching bones, work those muscles loose, brush yourself off, there is a New Year before you, unknown and unproved, but unlimited. The drapes of mourning should come down. The bright flags of anticipation have gone back up. Be done with the old, it is time for the new.

Nietzsche and his kin would say you are a fool: fool to trust that up where the road makes the turn, beyond where you and I can see, where sight succumbs to hope; where our fingers can no longer reach to touch and grasp; fools to think that up there or out there, or in there, there is something, no someone, who cares and can do something about it. Nietzsche said that all there is is what you can see and touch and control with power. But Nietzsche is wrong again, and so is everyone else who would deny you the right to put your hand into the hand of God. That is Paul again, speaking to his friends at Philippi and the little tent maker makes some sense: "This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth to those things which are ahead, I press on toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling in Jesus Christ our Lord." (Philippians 3:13-14)

That's what we are after: The prize of our calling in Christ Jesus, and of that we each need to be reminded to stake our claim. Bills press in, family pressures mount, business refuses to turn around, the Pension Board says your income will be reduced, a child disappoints you. To please God is not as demanding as the current day by day affairs. Here is a little favorite New Year's prayer called, "Just One Request."

Just One Request

"Dear Master for this coming year
Just one request I bring:
I do not pray for happiness,
Or any earthly thing –
I do not ask to understand
The way Thou leadest me,
But this I ask: Teach me to do
The Thing that pleaseth Thee.

I want to know Thy guiding voice,
To walk with Thee each day.
Dear Master make me swift to hear
And ready to obey.
And thus the year I now begin
A happy year will be –
If I am seeking just to do
The thing that pleaseth Thee."

Oh now, you don't have to do anything really, honest you don't. You can pretend that God is not telling me to tell you to change your ways or to put aside your hurts, or to get started out anew. You can spend New Year's Eve out on the town, or spend a quiet night at home, have a champagne or a diet coke toast to the New Year and go to sleep, get up and it's 2002. Ho hum...made it through another year.

Or, you can challenge it and vow to change your view. You can let the same old habit destroy you, or the same old grudge be a burden, you can be a grouch and jockey for position to get your command position back, or you can turn it up a notch and relax.

In The New York Times on Friday December 28, 2001, an article titled "As New Year's Eve Approaches, Uncertainty on Whether To Celebrate" was written by Susan Saulny. It said: "Half a million people are expected tomorrow night in Times Square, but so far there are reduced reservations for parties all across the City. Some are concerned for security, some for money, and some for the appropriateness of trying to be joyful. The prices at the Rainbow Room Rockefeller Center came down from \$2000 each, last New Year's Eve, to \$650 this New Year's Eve. And still it's slow. One organizer said however: 'At midnight we're going to celebrate (in Times Square). We're looking back, but we are also celebrating our hope for the future.'"

I have always adored the words of II Corinthians 5:17, "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he/she is a new creation: the old has passed away, behold the new has come." Then, in the vision of Saint John in Revelation 21, which I have used as our text, it says "I saw a new heaven and a new earth." In verse five: "And he that sat upon the throne said, 'Behold I make all things new.'" The old age of Satan will be banished; all sins will have been punished. The new will come.

The Bible begins in the Old Testament Book of Genesis with a peaceful love-filled beautiful garden. Then man and woman were driven out to toil East of Eden. Tough times were coming because they refused to live in peace and harmony and in fellowship with God. So, The Lord sent them challenging times. Oh dear, did they ever come, and they continue, often with a vengeance. But when the final day arrives all of that will be gone away. God will make all things new. All things will be as new as tomorrow, but as old as the Garden of Eden. It all fits together, from the first book to the last. God is going somewhere with his world.

I will close with a story I once told you once in a different context. The story is true, but it took place so long ago I have forgotten exactly where I was when I first heard it. It has been lost, or

misplaced anyway, in the winding corridors of my mind and memory. In my office here at the church (as I always have), I keep a huge globe of the world. It reminds me of our concern with all the children of the world. It also reminds me of the story of a friend a long time ago, back when everybody's children were small, say 1972 or so. The ancient version of an educational present for your children in those days was not a fancy programmed computer, or phonics, or TV games, it was just a simple globe of the world. You have all seen one or have one. Well, a young couple gave one to their ten year old child. It was the kind which was illuminated inside.

Then, that evening, say around December 30, 1972, some friends were visiting. As the evening wore on and the little girl was long since in bed and soundly asleep, her father began talking with his guests about the changing face of the nations of the world. Oh dear, I'm glad I'm not a cartographer these days, or a teacher of geology. Things change so fast you cannot keep up with it. Every time I turn around, some new name and nation appears that I have never heard of before.

Anyway, things were simpler then, but as they talked downstairs, the father decided to go into little Angelia's room and bring the globe downstairs to brag a little on his gift, but also to settle an argument about where Zimbabwe was, back then named Rhodesia. He was sure he was right. It turned out he wasn't.

Do you have the picture now? Into her room he tiptoed, as quiet as could be, of course. He cautiously pulled out the plug and picked up the globe. He made nary a sound, but the little girl woke up anyway. And, when she realized what was happening, she called out in a sleepy but anxious voice "Hey Daddy, where are you going with my world?"

Oh dear. Did you hear her? As we step out into another New Year, will you promise me that you will take the echo of her concerned voice, and add to it the echo of all the children around the

globe who call out in unison to their parents, and grandparents, and guardians, to the leaders of every Nation, State, County, City, and Town, to every Teacher, Preacher, Policeman, Lawyer, Doctor and Indian Chief... "Where are you going with our world?" What are you doing to spread peace and good cheer? What seeds are you planting; the crops of which in time might help or hinder your children and all the other children in the world?

I will close with another poem. The Author is unknown:

For the New Year

"Ere thou sleepest, gently lay,
Every troubled thought away;
Put off worry and distress
As thou putttest off thy dress.
Drop thy burden and thy care
In the quiet arms of prayer."

"Lord, Thou knowest how I live;
All I've done amiss forgive;
All of good I've tried to do,
Strengthen, bless and carry through.
All I love in safety keep,
While in Thee I fall asleep."

"Lord, the newness of the day,
Calls me to an untried way,
Let me gladly take the road,
Give me strength to bear my load.
Thou my guide and helper be.
I will travel through with Thee."

Through Jesus Christ our Lord, for now
and forever more. Amen.

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