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**PRESIDENT'S LETTER - JANUARY 09  
HAPPY NEW YEAR!**

Swift to it close ebbs out life's little day;  
Earth's joys grow dim, its glories pass away;  
Change and decay in all around I see,  
O Thou, who changest not, abide with me.  
TLH 552:2

These familiar words are from an Easter hymn penned by a pastor who was preaching his last sermon based on the words of the two disciples on the way to Emmaus, "Abide with us." This hymn is now used as an evening hymn and is often used at funeral services. They are fitting words for us as pastors. In our lives and ministries we pray, "Abide with me."

The beginning of a new year is marked by plans for change in the upcoming year. Some goal-oriented people make resolutions. Congregations are involved in planning for the work of the upcoming year as they adopt budgets and elect officers. An entire political campaign was run and won based on the mantra of change. A desire for change usually results from a dissatisfaction with present conditions. While sometimes it is asserted that "Lutherans" don't like change of any kind, it is also true that many congregations and church bodies pursue change in form (liturgy or structure of ministry) and change in doctrine out of a desperate attempt to stem the loss of members or financial support.

In the face of his death, the hymn writer expressed the futility of finding answers in the changing things of this world. The more things change, the more they stay the same. The Preacher expressed the axiom, "There is nothing new under the sun." There have been many changes in the world since my father was born in 1917. His generation saw more and more drastic changes than the rest of recorded history. Just think of the GPS devices which were so popular this Christmas in contrast to the fact that one hundred years ago few people ventured more than fifty miles from their home.

The reality of life is "change and decay in around I see." One of the arguments against evolution is that almost always changes (mutations) are bad. The changes of earthly life do not and cannot produce a better life. The circumstances of life are always changing for us as individuals. This year my family has experienced what seemed like a life-time worth of changes in our health. After sixty, a person especially begins to realize the reality of the deterioration of physical and mental capabilities. The

disappearance of over 25% of people's investments in the last half of year emphasizes the folly of simply building bigger barns. As pastors there are years in which our congregations and ministries experience cataclysmic changes. Think back fifty years ago to the events that led to the formation of the Church of the Lutheran Confession.

As the reality of death settles in, the vanity of earth's joys and its passing glory becomes more apparent. The unbeliever scoffs at the concept of a judgment day and end of all things created. "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up" (2 Pet 3:10). We face many changes in our lives.

However, we are assured that amidst the changes and decay that we see all around us, there is one thing that does not change. That is God and His eternal love in Jesus Christ. The hymn writer flees to the unchanging Savior-God, "O Thou, who changest not." We also pray, "Abide with me."

There is one anchor in this sea of change. "Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures" (James 1:16-18). We do not require anything new or different. In spite of the danger of being led astray by diverse and strange teachings, the writer to the Hebrews assures us that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Hebrews 13:8).

God's answer for the sins of our the rebellious and perverse early youth are found in the message of salvation which never changes. God's love as revealed in Jesus' perfect life and substitutionary death is God's unchanging answer for death. God's answer is revealed in the unchanging Scriptures. The Bible is the only book that does not have to change to be relevant and true. Our task as pastors is simply to proclaim the unchanging Gospel to a changing world.

We do not know what transitory changes will affect our lives and our ministries. We do not have to fear what the present or future holds in store for us. Our prayer in the new year and every day of our life is simply, "Abide with me."



John Schierenbeck

#### Mundane Matters:

Please remember to have your CBP figures into Pastor Mike Roehl's hands by the end of January. The CBP material from the Board of Trustees will soon be in your hands.