

Psalm 90
"Numbering Our Days"
New Year's Eve

December 31, 2020
First Lutheran Church, Glencoe, Minn.
Pastor Peter Adelsen

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen!

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

[Intro]

In a matter of hours, the year 2020 will be over. We will bid farewell to another year.

2020 is a year that we will not soon forget. This is the year that brought forth distancing. Before this year, you likely never heard of social distancing or distance learning. This was the year of the Bubble and the Thunderdome. Sports fans were replaced by audience cardboard cutouts and virtual fans. Orchestras performed in front of empty theaters to a live-streamed audience. Many of us learned how to work from home.

This past year brought about many changes and challenges to our lives. When we began 2020, we thought we could plan out the year, but we had to learn how to live one day at a time, as we had to learn to live with constant change.

For many of us, fear and worry struck our minds. The unknown of a novel virus, along with riots and further unrest led us to fear and worry about our life and the world around us. This fear and worry has captivated many of us throughout this year as we found ourselves glued to our television sets.

Whatever you thought about 2020, this year sure reminded us to number our days.

This evening, we heard what is likely the oldest Psalm. You would have thought Psalm 1 might be the oldest, but it is likely that the oldest is Psalm 90. What makes Psalm 90 unique is that it was written by Moses. It is likely that the Holy Spirit inspired Moses to write this Psalm toward the end of his life.

The most familiar verse in Psalm 90 is verse 12: ***"So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom."***

But what exactly does it mean for us to number our days? Moses leads us to that answer through his Psalm.

[God is Eternal]

First, Moses tells of God's eternal existence saying, ***“Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God”*** (Psalm 90:1-2).

Here, Moses traces God's existence to even before time existed. As the eternal God, He has always been. He never came into being, since He always exists. He has no beginning. God just always is.

God is the dwelling place, or refuge, for all generations. He is where we are to turn to for security. But, due to our sinful nature as inherited from our first parents Adam and Eve, we do not always remember God as our refuge. In our sin, we often turn to false idols for our refuge. We think we can save ourselves and become our own refuge.

No matter what we try to do, man always returns to what man was: dust.

[Man is Temporary]

God is eternal, but man is temporary. At the end of your life, one of two things will happen: either Christ will come descending from the clouds or you will die. Until Christ comes again, due to our sin, every human being will die. Man was formed from the dust of the ground and man will return to the dust of the ground.

Yet, our sin leads us to live our life as though there were no death. We think we will live forever. We like to think that we will always have time. We don't want to talk about death. In fact, we like to hide death.

This appears to be one of the reasons behind cremation. For many people, cremation is not about the funeral costs, it's actually about avoiding the sight of death. Instead of facing death in the casket, death is hidden.

When someone dies unexpected, we can no longer be with our departed one. We may stress ourselves with these questions: “Why didn't I call?” and “Why didn't I visit more often?”

We have all seen loved ones die, but until my generation is next – we often think, death is far away, but is it? As we grow older, years begin to feel like months, and months begin to feel like days. Before you know it, death is before you.

We may believe we live a healthy and active life, but being healthy and active does not prevent death. We always think we have time. But we indeed face death at any moment.

For some of us, the prospect of death became more of a reality this year amid the pandemic. But even before COVID-19, we still faced death without even realizing it. Due to sin in the world, heart disease, cancer, distracted driving, influenza, and countless other causes led to death. So, just because we don't notice death all around us, it doesn't make the prospect of death go away.

Moses reminds us that God can sweep us away as with a flood, that we are like a dream, and that we are like grass that fades and withers (Psalm 90:5-6).

Human mortality is like a dream quickly forgotten. All of us face the reality that life is short.

As much as humanity searches for a cure for death, no vaccine or pill will ever end death. Our temporal bodies will eventually wear out. Death is certain. Death is unavoidable. Death is a constantly threatening tyrant. We must go about our tasks with full awareness that we will die.

Each of us must die because the wages of sin is death. Moses reminds us of that when he says: ***“For we are brought to an end by your anger; by your wrath we are dismayed. You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence. For all our days pass away under your wrath; we bring our years to an end like a sigh. The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty; yet their span is but toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away”*** (Psalm 90:7-10).

Due to our sin, we each deserve God's anger and wrath. God's wrath brings light to every violation of His holy will, even those sins that are hidden from our thinking.

You see, sin wreaks havoc in the whole creation. Our lives can be characterized as toil and trouble, but in the end, life comes to a close with just a sigh.

[Number Our Days]

For this, Moses prays with us that we would be taught to number our days, so that we may get a heart of wisdom (Psalm 90:12).

You see, the eternal God – *who came into our flesh to dwell with us* – came so that our fear in God’s impending wrath would turn to the hope of eternal life. Jesus Christ came to save us from our sins, so that whoever would believe in Him would have eternal life.

For the unbeliever, they are unable to have any assurance after death. They live their lives hoping that death will never come. They live their lives in fear of the unknown after death. Since we live in the world, the unbeliever’s fear can become our fear.

In the midst of this, the only way our fears subside is by trusting in Jesus. So, shed your fears by confessing them to Jesus. He is the only place where true comfort is found! A Government mandate may be designed to give us temporal peace and safety, but no government mandate can give anyone eternal peace. True peace is only found in Jesus!

For everyone in Christ, we know that life can vanish like a shadow. We know this life is exceedingly brief. We know this life is full of pain and sorrow. We know that death is coming.

Even with this fact, we pray with Moses that the Holy Spirit might teach us to number our days. Each day we have is a gift from God. Each day we have is a blessing. We do not pray that God would tell us the exact number of days in our life, but that we consider how short our life is, which could end at any moment.

We number our days in humility knowing that we could be living our last day and so we seek God’s grace and mercy.

Unlike the unbelieving world around us, we do not live in despair, because we trust in the promise of God as we live in hope and in faith. You see, the only answer for death – *the only cure for death* – is faith in Jesus Christ!

In Christ alone, we have the sure and certain hope in the resurrection of all flesh. Through His atoning suffering and death, and His glorious resurrection from the dead, we know for certain that when we take our final breath, our life is not over.

We are not left in God's anger and wrath, instead we are in God's grace and favor.

Like Simeon, who received comfort when he saw the young Jesus in the Temple, we too, are able to depart this life in peace as God's saving Word has been fulfilled through His only Son, so that through hearing His Word and receiving His Sacrament, God freely gives us His grace and mercy, so we are prepared when death comes.

Through God's grace and mercy, we live in God's comfort and assurance! By faith in Christ alone, we are conquerors of death through His love for you and me. His love was displayed for all the world as His blood was shed for the sins of the entire world upon the cross. We, who share in Christ's victory, are ***“sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord”*** (Romans 8:38-39).

While the unbelieving world lives in fear and despair about the reality of death, we, through Christ, live in hope and comfort knowing that nothing separates us from the love of God. Through Christ's love, we do not fear death, but trust in the promise of eternal life.

One of two things is for certain, either Christ returns at an hour you do not expect, like a thief in the night (Luke 12:39; 1 Thessalonians 5:2) or we die. Until that day, Lord, help us all to number our days and always turn to You in our time of doubt and fear, for You are our dwelling place, You are our refuge, and in You we find strength to meet the days ahead!

O God, our help in ages past, / Our hope for years to come, / Be Thou our guard while troubles last / And our eternal home! (LSB 733, stanza 6)

As we begin 2021, remember that our God is eternal, and thanks to Jesus' cross and empty tomb, we shall spend eternity with Him. In light of this, we should number our days knowing that our life is short, but eternity in Christ is endless. Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

✠ SOLI DEO GLORIA ✠