

## Isaiah 45:20-25

<sup>20</sup>Gather! Come! Draw near together,  
you survivors from the nations.  
They have no knowledge  
—those who are lifting up their idols of wood  
and praying to a god that cannot save.

<sup>21</sup>Make an announcement and come close.

Let them consult together.  
Who made this known ahead of time?  
From time past who announced it?  
Was it not I, the LORD?

There is no god except me,  
a righteous God and Savior.

There is no one except me.

<sup>22</sup>Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth,  
because I am God,  
and there is no other.

<sup>23</sup>I have sworn by myself.

From my mouth a righteous word has gone out,  
and it will not return unfulfilled.

Indeed, to me every knee will bow,  
and every tongue will swear allegiance.

<sup>24</sup>“Only in the LORD,” they will say of me,

“Only in the LORD is there true righteousness and strength.”

To him they will come and be ashamed—  
all those who are angry at him.

<sup>25</sup>In the LORD, all the descendants of Israel will be justified.

They will be praised by him.

(Evangelical Heritage Version — EHV)

## Repent and Repeat

### I.

On this First Sunday after Christmas we find ourselves at the threshold of a new year. This provides us with a good opportunity to reflect on the past year and decide what we need to change to make the coming year better. There have been sorrows and joys in 2017. There have been problems and blessings. There are sins to repent of, and then move on. As we leave 2017 and journey into 2018, it's time to leave the bad memories behind, take the good ones along with us, and start all over again.

But before you toss the old calendar in the Paper Gator to be recycled, take a look at it. What was the overall theme of the past year for you? Which days will you remember as precious? Which were pivotal? Were the past 364 days stressful or filled with peace and happiness?

The saying goes: “history repeats itself.” Writer and philosopher George Santayana is most likely the one who originated the saying. His original quote went this way: “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” Certainly any of us who look at what we have done in 2017 and what has happened to us can find some patterns. Some of those are bad habits that need to be changed. Others are good habits or behaviors we want to encourage in ourselves for yet another year.

### II.

Some things are just universal. You can see the same patterns reemerging throughout history. That's because there is one universal problem that has been around since just days after the

creation was completed. Scripture calls it sin.

The people to whom Isaiah spoke certainly were aware of the pattern of history created by sin. The history of their nation was fraught with problems. The People of Israel grumbled against God and against Moses as they were led from Egypt toward the Promised Land. They even abandoned the true God for the Golden Calf until they were called to repentance.

The period of the Judges shows how the patterns persisted even after the people were in the Promised Land of Israel. Again and again the people abandoned the true God to follow the influence of their neighbors and began to worship false gods. Again and again God allowed them to be oppressed by other nations. Yet God sent leader after leader to the people to call the people to repentance and to defeat their enemies and reestablish the worship of the true God in the land. The same patterns continued after God allowed Israel to have kings to rule their land, as other nations had. Throughout Old Testament history Israel abandoned the true God time and time again and had to be recalled time and time again.

These repetitive patterns show us how firmly rooted sin is in the human psyche. They also show how great and overwhelming God's love for us is. When there is repentance, God is willing again and again to grant restoration. God says: "There is no god except me, a righteous God and Savior. There is no one except me" (Isaiah 45:21, EHV).

Can you see the same pattern today? Scripture tells us that by nature we are enemies of God. Paul writes: "The mind-set of the sinful flesh is hostile to God" (Romans 8:7, EHV). Our lesson today says: "They have no knowledge—those who are lifting up their idols of wood and praying to a god that cannot save" (Isaiah 45:20, EHV). We may not have wooden idols in our homes, but we don't always put our trust in the Lord. All kinds of other things vie for first place in our hearts — family, money, fame, leisure time, recreation — all want to exclude God and his will in our lives.

Financial advisors often encourage their clients not to put all their eggs in one basket; in other words, a person's investment strategy should be to diversify their portfolio and make sure that their investments are in a number of different areas of possibility so that if one takes a loss the investor won't lose everything.

So much has this attitude taken hold that we tend to use the concept of diversifying in our spiritual lives, too. We love God, but we may not place 100% of our trust in him. Part of our trust goes to the bank account, part to our own skills in making a living, part to our possessions, part to our intelligence, and so on. Once we begin shifting our trust from the Lord, not only have we broken the First Commandment, but our allegiance to many of the other Commandments of God is compromised, as well. One sin quickly leads to another: cursing, rebelling against authority, sexual misconduct, abusing others. Diversification is a terrible idea when it comes to the Christian faith.

### III.

A review of the history of Israel and your own personal history has some sad parallels, doesn't it? Fortunately, God also has a pattern of behavior. It is entirely consistent and predictable.

Again and again Israel deserted the LORD for false gods. Again and again the LORD restored them. When they were slaves in Egypt, God sent Moses to lead them out of captivity toward the Promised Land. God raised up the Judges to save his people. David was the first of the good kings of Israel, and there were others from time to time in Israel and Judah whom God used to lead his people to the truth.

God's pattern of repeated history has been brought to us in the person of our Lord Jesus. In today's Gospel, Simeon held the baby Jesus and exclaimed: "Lord, you now dismiss your servant in peace, according to your word, <sup>30</sup>because my eyes have seen your salvation, <sup>31</sup>which you have prepared before the face of all people, <sup>32</sup>a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel" (Luke 2:29-32, EHV). To most of the onlookers in the temple that day, this baby looked much like all the other baby boys brought to be circumcised as their official adoption into the family of God. Through the Holy Spirit, Simeon saw something more. He was holding the baby

who was sent by God to save all people. He understood what God said in our text today: “Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth, because I am God, and there is no other” (Isaiah 45:22, EHV).

God’s repeated acts of kindness were finally fulfilled at Jesus’ death. Peter tells us: “He himself carried our sins in his body on the tree so that we would be dead to sins and alive to righteousness. By his wounds you were healed” (1 Peter 2:24, EHV).

Even though we know the sins of our past, we tend to repeat those sins again and again. Jesus earned for us the forgiveness we need for our tendency to repeat our evil past. The writer to the Hebrews says: “He has appeared once and for all, at the climax of the ages, in order to take away sin by the sacrifice of himself” (Hebrews 9:26, EHV). One sacrifice took away the sins of the whole world. Through Isaiah God put it this way: “In the LORD, all the descendants of Israel will be justified. They will be praised by him” (Isaiah 45:25, EHV).

#### IV.

The pattern is profound. We repent of our past mistakes and seek God’s forgiveness and strength to guide us in the future. It happens every Sunday as we repent in the worship service and realize the love of God displayed for us in Christ Jesus. We said it again today at the Confession and Absolution portion of our service: “Merciful Father in heaven, I am altogether sinful from birth. In countless ways I have sinned against you and do not deserve to be called your child. But trusting in Jesus, my Savior, I pray: have mercy on me according to your unfailing love. Cleanse me from my sin, and take away my guilt.”

Repentance is critical in the life of a Christian. We see that we have bad habits and patterns of living and desire to change direction. In the absolution we receive the comfort that God’s pattern of mercy toward us will continue for Jesus’ sake. Luther called the absolution the second part of confession. Not only did we confess today, we also heard forgiveness announced: “God, our heavenly Father, has forgiven all your sins. By the perfect life and innocent death of our Lord Jesus Christ, he has removed your guilt forever. You are his own dear child. May God give you strength to live according to his will.”

Remembering our baptism every day accomplishes the same thing. In the Small Catechism Luther asks: “*What does baptizing with water mean?* Baptism means that the old Adam in us should be drowned by daily contrition and repentance, and that all its evil deeds and desires be put to death. It also means that a new person should daily arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.”

Are you one of those people who makes New Year’s resolutions? Perhaps you figure there’s no need to bother, since you will break them, anyway. When it comes to faith, make a few resolutions. There are areas in your life that need to be addressed and changed. God the Holy Spirit turns our attention to the only One who can make that change in our lives. Isaiah writes: “Only in the LORD is there true righteousness and strength” (Isaiah 45:24, EHV).

The Apostle Paul in our Second Lesson for today lists some appropriate New Year’s resolutions: “As God’s elect, holy and loved, clothe yourselves with heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. <sup>13</sup>Bear with one another and forgive each other if anyone has a complaint against anyone else. Forgive, just as Christ forgave you. <sup>14</sup>And, in addition to all these things, put on love, which ties things together in perfect unity” (Colossians 3:12-14, EHV). It is the forgiveness we have and enjoy in Christ Jesus that gives us the ability to display Christian love and virtue to one another.

#### V.

What a great way to begin the new year! Remember the repeating themes of the past, recognizing the sinful patterns in your life that are caused by a failure to trust in God alone. Repent of them, and bask in the forgiveness God has given you in Christ Jesus. Resolve by the power of the Holy Spirit to live in your faith by showing the love of God in the things you do and say in the New Year. Amen.