

Welcome to the first Sunday of 2015! I kind of miss having candles to light this morning. The season of Advent has come and gone, however, in parts of the Lord's church they celebrate 12 days of Christmas beginning on Christmas and ending on January 6th, on Epiphany. From a Greek word meaning "manifestation" Epiphany celebrates the visit of the Magi to the infant Jesus and is often celebrated on the Sunday closest to January 6th. We don't really know when they arrived, but Epiphany gives the church an opportunity to celebrate the manifestation of Jesus to the gentiles. Remember the Magi were not Jews but gentiles like us. The good news is God gave his son for the sins of the whole world. That's what we celebrate today: Jesus came to save folks like us. Hear the word of the Lord from Ephesians regarding the Gentiles. Remember the church in Ephesus Paul was writing to was made up of non-Jews. (Ephesians 3:1-21.)

As we begin this new year. Let's give thanks to God that he saw fit to reveal his mercy and grace to the likes of us!

2015 The Year Of Peace

We say Carbondale is a place of healing, hope, laughter and peace and we've been using that as a theme for the past three years. 2012 we called a year of healing, 2013 a year of hope, 2014 a year of laughter and this year our theme is a year of peace. We can only pray and hope for a year of peace in our church, our families, our lives. It would be wonderful to find peace in our communities, peace among the races and nations, but in all honesty, it's not likely. Peace is not something we can find apart from a relationship with Jesus and the majority of this world chooses to reject or ignore the giver of peace. Look to Jesus if you are looking for peace!

With that said, this message isn't all about peace. I just felt I was to share a couple of things with you this morning that I believe can help us through 2015. First of all, I should warn you **The devil will be the devil in 2015.** It's his nature and he will stir things up where he can. I know it sounds contradictory, to call 2015 a year of peace and at the same time warn you that the devil will act the devil in 2015. The truth is, it has always been that way. The peace that Jesus gives to us is not an absence of trouble, it is the knowledge and awareness of His Presence in the midst of the trouble. Jesus said, **"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."** **John 16:33.** We will experience trouble in 2015 because we are still living in this

world, but “take heart!” Jesus said, because he has overcome the world and through Him and in Him, we too are overcomers. We will not be defeated because he has given us his peace. It’s not like the world’s brand of peace that is dependent upon everything going our way, it is dependent upon knowing Jesus and abiding in Him. If we obey him and keep our mind and heart focused on him, he has promised to keep us in perfect peace (Isaiah 26:3). Jesus said, **“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” John 14:27**

We can rest in his peace regardless of what 2015 brings and in spite of what the devil may throw at us. We have no reason to be afraid because the Lord will be with us throughout 2015.

I don’t know the particulars of what the devil may throw at us this year, I just know he won’t stop trying. In the book of Revelation the bible describes Satan as **“...that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth and his angels with him...the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night... But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short.” Revelation 12:9-12**

We can expect the devil to try to deceive us because he is a deceiver. He leads the whole world astray. Remember the boundary stone sermons from the fall? We have to know what we believe and what the word of God says or the devil will lead us astray along with the rest of the world! Don’t be deceived. Know what the word of God says.

We can expect the devil to try to distract and derail us. He accuses us before God and before the world. He wants to make us defensive, to take our eyes off of the ball – to take our eyes off of the prize and off of Jesus. He will condemn, confuse, distract, defeat and destroy us if he can. He wants to bind you, afflict you, addict you, steal your hope, peace and joy. He is a liar and the father of lies. He is the thief that has come to kill, steal and destroy. But Jesus said not to let our hearts be troubled and don’t be afraid because Jesus has overcome the world and the devil! Woe to the earth and the sea, the bible said, because the devil has gone down to you. But he didn’t say woe to the people of God. The devil has come to kill and destroy but Jesus has come to give us life! Notice the devil is filled with fury because he knows his time is short. We foolishly think we have all the time in the world but the devil knows his time is limited. He is looking to do all the damage he can and he is picking up momentum because he

knows the time is growing shorter. We need to be diligent and faithful. We need to read the clock the same way the devil does – much to be done and little time to do it. But our response to that is not panic but obedience and faithfulness! The time is short so live for Jesus! **2015: Don't be afraid. Live obediently. Live consistently. Live faithfully. Live in His peace.**

The devil is going to do all he can to defeat you, but don't be afraid. Instead, be encouraged because we know what the end of his story will be. The apostle Paul wrote, **“The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.” Romans 16:20.** His end is coming and so is our new beginning! Be at peace and trust in the Lord!

I felt I was to share a couple of stories with you. I want to give you a mental image to carry with you through 2015. Turn to **Mark 4:35.** This is the story of Jesus calming the storm on the sea of Galilee. (Read Mark 4:35-41). Jesus told them “Let us go over to the other side.” The next thing you know there is a storm that comes up – a “furious squall” the bible says. The waves are swamping over the boat. “If not for the courage of the fearless crew, the minnow would be lost... the minnow would be lost.” But this whole time Jesus is asleep in the stern of the boat, sleeping on a cushion. In a panic the disciples awaken Jesus. “Teacher, don't you care if we drown?” Jesus got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, “Quiet! Be still!” “Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.”

Here is the picture I want you to get for 2015. Regardless of the severity of the storms that may come this year, **Jesus is in the boat with us!** It doesn't matter if the wind is howling and the waves are crashing or if it is smooth sailing, Jesus is in the boat with us and that will make all the difference! Remember I said peace is not the absence of trouble, it is the knowledge and awareness of God's presence. The reality is if Jesus is in the boat with us, then **Peace is in the boat with us!** Peace isn't found in the absence of wind and waves; peace wasn't found when the storm stopped – peace was found in the stern of the ship, asleep on the cushion.

Get this mental image of you and Jesus in the boat together. Jesus said, “Let us go over to the other side.” In spite of what may happen between when you get in the boat with Jesus and when you arrive on the other side, you will get to the other side! Regardless of what 2015 holds you and Jesus are going to the other side. Throughout the coming year, **Be aware of his promise and his presence.** He is with you and you are going with him to the other side because he said so! God promised **“Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.” Hebrews 13:5.** We have his promise and his presence. He is in the boat with us, whether it is in a storm or in

calm, he is with us and we are going to the other side.

Sometime in 2015 you are going to encounter a storm. Somewhere you are going to be asking like the disciples, “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?” And when you do, I hope you will stop and picture Jesus, the prince of peace, in the boat with you. “But the wind is so strong.” Yes, but look who is in the boat with you. He promised he wouldn’t leave you or forsake you and he said “let’s go over to the other side.” “But the waves are so high, I’m afraid we are going to drown.” Yes, but the one who can calm the wind and the waves with his word is in the boat with you. Does it matter if he calms the wind as long as he is in the boat with you? I think not. Let him calm you whether he calms the wind and waves or not. For 2015, be aware of his promise and his presence in any storm you face. **Jesus is with you in the storm!**

Now, turn to **John 2:1-11**. This is the story of Jesus turning water into wine at a wedding in Cana and John tells us this was the first of the miraculous signs Jesus performed during his ministry. I heard T D Jakes preaching from this passage a couple of weeks ago and something was said that just stuck in my mind and my spirit. I felt I was to share this today.

This is a strange story in many ways, but Jesus and his disciples, along with his mother were all invited to this wedding. Cana was just a few miles from Nazareth so it is probable this was the wedding of a family friend or someone Jesus had grown up with in Nazareth. Weddings lasted seven days and to run out of wine during the wedding would be a major social faux pas and a terrible embarrassment to the host. Unfortunately they ran out of wine and Jesus’ mother tells him about it, implying he should do something about it. We don’t know if she meant for Jesus and his disciples to go purchase more wine as a wedding gift or if she expected him to miraculously do something about it. That seems to be the case when she says to the servants standing nearby, **“Do whatever he tells you.”**

John tells us there are six stone water jars, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons. They were used to fill an immersion pool for ceremonial washing by the Jews. Jesus told the servants to fill the jars with water so they filled them to the brim. Then Jesus told them to “draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet.” The bible says, **“They did so, and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew.”**

Now, I’ve got some questions. Jesus told these servants to pour water into the stone jars, then draw some water out of the jars, so they must have poured some into another container or

pitcher. Then he told them to take what you've drawn out to the master of the banquet and let him taste it. The servants must have been thinking, "Why are we doing this? This is silly. Why are we taking a pitcher of water to the master of the banquet? Pour water in, now pour some into something else. He doesn't want water. He wants wine!" My question is, when did the water become wine? Was it when they poured the water out of the jars and into some other container? Was it as they were carrying the pitcher to the master? Or perhaps as they handed the cup to the master that the water turned into wine? What were the servants thinking?

I don't know the answer as to when the miracle happened. No one does really. What I know for sure is that somewhere between Mary telling them "Do whatever he tells you" and those servants giving a drink to the master of the banquet, somewhere along there Jesus turned between 120 and 180 gallons of water into the some kind of fine wine. The only people at the wedding that knew what happened besides Jesus were the servants that had carried the water.

Now hear is my point for 2015. Jesus may have you filling water jars and you can't understand what it's all about this year. "Why am I filling jars with water when there are more important things to be done? My talents are being wasted." "Why isn't God answering my prayers? I need him to provide for me and instead all I'm doing is hauling water back and forth." The truth is, you are participating in a miracle. **Keep being faithful. Keep being obedient. You don't know when the water is going to be changed into wine!**

You may be looking back wondering if it's all been worth it. You haven't seen any miracles happening, you feel like it's all been a waste. That's because you are carrying water right now, but don't give up, don't stop being obedient, a miracle is about to happen. Don't stop living in faithfulness to God and his word now. That may be water in the pitcher right now, but 2015 may be the year when things change and the water turns to wine. You may be out of wine, money, peace, hope. You may be in greater need than the host of the wedding was, but don't stop trusting God. Here is a key to making it through 2015: **"Do whatever he tells you."** **John 2:5** Start obeying like the servants did and you may see a miracle before the year is out!

What if the water turned to wine just as the servant handed it to the master of the banquet? And what if you had given up as you drew the water out of the jar? "I'm tired of obeying Jesus and his word and nothing happening. I poured water in and I drew water out. Big deal. I obeyed and nothing happened, nothing changed." But you aren't finished yet. The story isn't over. It's long obedience in the same direction as someone once said. It's not about being

faithful and obedient for awhile, it's faithfulness and obedience to the end. Keep going. Don't stop serving Jesus now. 2015 may be the year when the water turns to wine.

Here is the image I want you to get. Picture yourself carrying a pitcher of water. You are taking it to the master of the banquet. You don't know why, you don't know what it's all about, but you know you are doing what Jesus told you to do. Trust him because somewhere after trust and obedience comes provision! I'm obeying Jesus, carrying water, but it just may turn into wine before long!

John 2:11 says of Jesus and the miracle at the wedding, **“He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him.”** **John 2:11** You don't want to stop now because he is just about ready to reveal his glory to you. He is just about to show up and change the common into the uncommon. He is about to turn the ordinary into the best wine. 2015 may be the year he reveals his glory and victory in your life. Put your faith in Him. Be aware of his power and his provision at work in your life. Keep serving. Remain faithful. Remain obedient. Like the water turning into wine, 2015 may be a year of miraculous transformation for you – a year of miraculous provision. Who knows what Jesus may do as he reveals his glory in you and your circumstances. It may be a year of peace after all. Keep doing whatever he tells you, be faithful and watch what happens.

I found a prayer a few months ago that I have often prayed as I start my day. It is taken from *A Diary of Private Prayer* by the late John Baillie, a Scottish pastor and theologian. I've changed it slightly for us to pray as we begin this new year. **“Father, you alone know what lies before me this year, grant that in every hour of it I may stay close to you. Let me embark on no undertaking that is not in line with your will for my life, nor shrink from any sacrifice which your will may demand. Suggest, direct, control every movement of my mind, for my Lord Christ's sake. Amen.”** (*A Diary of Private Prayer* by John Baillie)