

SERMON  
 First Lutheran Church  
 Aitkin, Minnesota

John 3:1-21  
 Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen  
 January 28, 2018

God has given us a **plan for the coming year**. God has given us a plan for the **rest of our lives**. God has given us a plan for **until Jesus comes again**. This Sunday is our **annual congregational meeting**. At this meeting, we will consider where we have been in the past year and **where God calls us to go in the year ahead**. God has given us a plan, and God presents it to us in our Gospel text from John today.

First, God gives us **God's mission**. "**For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.**" (John 3:16-17.) God has invited God's people, First Lutheran Church, you and me, the Body of Christ – **to share, by word and by deed**, the **Good News of God's truly amazing love and grace** for each and every person. God calls us to **invite every person to entrust their lives** safely into **God's faithful, unailing care**, for now and for all of eternity.

God gives us a mission to **partner with God** for the **salvation of our world**. Then, God gives us the **means** to carry out our **mission**. "**Jesus answered, 'Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.'**" (John 3:5-8.) God has gifted each and all of us with the Holy Spirit at our baptisms. It is **God's Holy Spirit** that is **constantly moving to help us to fulfill God's Holy Calling in our lives**, church and world. The Holy Spirit is always moving, like the wind, to **bring about the best good despite the limping and fractured lives and world** that we sometimes experience.

God gives us a **mission**, the **means to perform it** and **hoped-for-results** from **God's work, our faith and following**. “**And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.**” (John 3:19-21.) In the first chapter of John's Gospel, we hear, “**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.**” (John 1:1-5.) **Jesus** is the **source of true life** for any who will have it. Jesus is the **light of hope, truth and good** shining in our dark and frightening world right now. **No amount of darkness can overcome Christ's light and life** shining in **each of our hearts** and in **our faith family**. **Jesus** is the **light that surrounds us, makes us one** and **enables us** to **make a life-giving difference** every day. You and me.

**God brought me into this world** 65 years and 4 months ago. For 20 years, my **parents worked to mold** me into a **decent human being**. My dad was even offering to pay for me to get a decent hair cut when I was in my 30s. And to buy me decent dress shoes. He thought that if I was going to be a pastor, at least I ought to look decent. For almost 45 years, **my wife, Jennifer, has been working to mold me** into a **decent husband**. . . And she's made some progress. Thankfully, she hasn't given up on me yet.

Take a look at the **photo on the front page of our bulletin**. That is a photo of me **taken on my baptism day 65 years ago**. **No!** That is a picture of each and of all of us on our baptism day. God **created** us in our mother's womb. God **brought us**

**into this world.** God **claimed us** as children of God in our baptism. And from that moment on, each of us has been **looking off into the future of our God-given, God-blessed lives.** Since my baptism, 65 years ago, God has been working to:

- **Love and care for me** in every way,
- **Help me to love and trust God** with every part of my life,
- Help me to **love and care about the well-being of my neighbors,** every one of them,
- Help me to **love and care for the well-being of God’s amazing and precious creation.**

Thankfully, **God hasn’t given up on me yet.**

**None of us measures up to God’s high hopes for our lives.** But, God’s loving, compassionate, forgiving, healing, **life-giving Spirit/Wind keeps blowing** in your life and mine, in this church and community, in this country and world. Moving to bring about God’s good and gracious will for all of us, for every person.

**What’s your story? How has God been moving** in your life to give hope, healing and new life? **How have you responded** to God’s Spirit call? **Where are you headed** in your walk with God? **Where is our faith family headed** with God?

Our mission, together in Christ here at First Lutheran, looks something like what happens in this little video clip, entitled, “**Help Each Other.**” (**Show video.**) In a classroom filled with children, a little boy has no lunch. He is hungry, sad and feeling all alone. While the other kids start eating their lunches, he raises his hand and leaves to use the restroom. Somehow, maybe with the help of their teacher, his **classmates fill his lunch box** with good food to eat, and **everyone has enough.** And he and everyone else is **blessed with the joy of sharing. Help each other?** As children of God, as sisters and brothers of Jesus, **we are called to make a life-giving difference** in this world. **One person at a time,** God’s Holy Spirit moves through us to **share God’s love – filling stomachs and filling hearts** – with the **best God has to offer.** “**For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son. . .**” **Jesus. Mission** – For God so loved. . . **Means** – The Spirit constantly blowing to give life. . . **Hoped-for-results** – **Living in and sharing the Source of Light and Life with our world** - **Jesus.** Thanks be to God. Amen.

