

# St. Paul's Herald

January 2026

## LETTER FROM PASTOR

Ready or not here we are. It's hard to believe that we are entering the year of our Lord 2026. I still remember thinking that the year 2020 was far off when I was younger and here we are six years past it already. Whether it be taking up a new activity, giving up an old habit, or changing our life in some way, New Year's is often seen as a time for a fresh start. The reality is though, just because the calendar indicates a different year does not mean we have or get a clear break from past situations, problems, or habits. The same relationship problems, issues, etc. will follow us from one year to another. Sure, a new year can bring a fresh perspective and new optimism for moving forward, but it is not a true blank slate for a fresh start that is untethered to the past.

Our past always follows us into the new year. It's no secret we could all use a fresh start from time to time; I know I certainly have desired one. I am sure you too can think of times from your own life as well. We all make mistakes, mess-up, and sin, which not only damages our relationship with others but with God. For us as Christians, however, we have something far better than a new year that offers a 'fresh start'. While it is true there is nothing we can do on our own to give ourselves a fresh start, God in His mercy and grace gives us a fresh start through Jesus Christ.

We, who were dead in our trespasses and sins have been made alive in Christ (see Eph. 2:1-6) We, who "are in Christ are a new creation [because] the old has passed away; behold the new has come" (2 Cor. 5:17). Through Jesus we are given a fresh start, not just on one relationship or activity but for our entire life including our relationship with God our creator. It's as if we receive a completely blank slate. It's

not a self-improvement project of trying to retrofit the old into the new; it's God making something completely brand new in you. The whole system/body is in a sense being replaced. Through our baptism into Christ, our sin, guilt, and shame have been removed. We have been fully refreshed with a garment of righteousness given to us by our savior.



What's more, we can return to our baptism not just at the beginning of the new year, but each day. Yes, it's true we continue to be sinners who will continue to fall short of God's glory. But it is also true that God's mercy is new for us each day. We can return to our baptism daily to remind us that we are made new in Christ. It's as if we get a blank slate, a fresh start every day because God does not remember our sins, for we are told in Psalm 103:12 "as far as East is from the West so far does [God] remove transgressions from us". So, daily remind yourself whose you are because of your baptism. Know that you are forgiven and are continually being given a fresh start because of Jesus Christ. Blessings as you continue to live renewed and refreshed each day in your savior dear beloved in Christ!



In Jesus name,

Pastor Josh

## CONNECTING TO GRACE

What are your thoughts on New Year's resolutions? Some people are all about them and others are not. There are so many different types of New Year's resolutions that vary just as much as the people who do them. For this reason, there are even various programs and people that promise to help you make your New Year's resolution successful. Studies have shown that while there are many variables that play into the success of a New Year's resolution, two factors usually make them more likely to work. First, the resolution must be something reasonable to obtain, not just a wish or a dream. Second, the person resolving to do said resolution must have outside support for it to be successful. Experience as well as data shows that a reasonable goal with support is far more likely to be achieved.

What does this have to do with us as followers of Christ though you may ask? Well, a great resolution, in fact, maybe the best resolution for the new year that you could have, is to be better connected to God's grace. Regular New Year's resolutions can be a good thing, but being regularly connected to God's grace is absolutely worth it. God wants what's best for you, and there is nothing better than being connected to His grace through Word and Sacrament. Titus 2:11-12 tells us "for the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passion, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age." Talk about an awesome goal. Unfortunately, it's a goal, or resolution, that we cannot achieve on our own.

Praise God for His grace that does what we cannot do for ourselves. On our own, we cannot even believe in God or His grace that comes through Jesus Christ (see 1 Cor. 12:3); that would be an unreasonable resolution.

However, Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit working within us, makes the impossible possible. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we "can draw near to God, [so that] he will draw near to [us] (James 4:8)" allowing us to be connected to His grace. Each time we read/hear His word, go to Him in prayer, and participate in worship, God's grace works in us to bring about all that is promised.

The same Spirit that allows for the connection to God's grace also continues to support that connection. This means that you can resolve to be better connected to God's grace this New Year; you have been given both the ability and support to do so. It is a more-than-worthwhile resolution because you have the Holy Spirit on your side to encourage you and support you, (as well as your fellow brothers & sisters in Christ). Resolve to be better connected to God's grace today because Christ promises to be with you through the power of the Holy Spirit as you do!

