



The year of 2020 was a year to remember. No one could have predicted COVID, the unrest and violence in major cities or the hardships of shutdowns or the number of business that have closed or any of the other events of the year could have accurately been seen in advance. What 2021 will bring is anyone's guess.

When we think about facing an unknown future, we often are fearful. We might ask ourselves: do we have enough strength to face the future? Is our faith strong enough for what lies ahead? The trouble with those questions is that in asking them, we are already relying entirely on ourselves. Of our own volition, we do not have enough strength to face the tribulations of this world. If faith were something we initiated, it would not be enough.

John the Baptist acknowledged Jesus to be the mightier one, "**The One whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie**" **St. Mark 1:7b**. To untie the sandals of the master was considered the lowliest of work for a slave. John makes himself even lower, acknowledging that Jesus is more powerful than all, that Jesus is Savior and John is His humble servant.

When we question our own strength to endure trial and tribulation or even the extent and strength of our faith, we are asking the wrong question because we are looking to ourselves for the answer. When we rely on ourselves, poor miserable sinners that we are, we are sure to have doubts. Perhaps, we can answer those questions with two more questions. "Are you baptized into The Name of Christ? Is your Savior, Jesus, strong enough to take care of you?" The answer is, yes, Christ is your Savior and you are His through your baptism that connects you to His cross and the blessings He won there for you. Christ is strong enough to overcome all for you and has by conquering all your enemies, especially sin, death and the devil by His own death and resurrection!

What can separate you from God's love in Christ? St. Paul writes under inspiration of The Holy Spirit in **Romans 8:31b-32**, "**If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things?**" God also promises through the words of the sacred writer, "**For I am 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.**"

The question is not about our own strength but that of Christ, our Savior. All the things Paul lists in **Romans 8:38-39** cannot, did not and will not overcome Our Savior who is The God/Man who overcomes all for us. Christ has overcome sin for us by fulfilling the Law for us. Christ has overcome death for us by rising on the third day putting death's permanent grip to death itself. Christ governs and rules over all things for the good of His Church, that the Gospel would flourish today and we can serve Him in our vocations to the glory of His Name, that others would be brought to saving faith. Nothing will interfere with God's grace and His love for us in Christ as **Romans 8:38-39** makes abundantly and beautifully clear. God's love is for you who believe and will not be withdrawn, for God does not change His mind nor is He overcome by the fickle shifting nature of the culture around us.

The death and resurrection of Christ, made our own in Baptism, overcomes all that would stand against us and guarantees our victory through Him who loves us. All that the world would throw against us pales in comparison to the riches of God's grace for us in Christ, our Savior! Christ has triumphed over all our enemies and therefore we have nothing to fear; our salvation is secure by God's grace through faith in Him!

The familiar New Year's hymn looks to God alone as our help:

O God, our help in ages past, Our hope for years to come.
Our shelter from the stormy blast, And our eternal home:
O God, our help in ages past, Our hope for years to come,
Be Thou our guard while trouble last And our eternal home.

LSB 733 stanzas 1 & 6

A Blessed New Year to all of you as God continues His providence for our salvation.

In Christ, Pastor Ahrendt