



New and Improved?

Just as the season for non-stop Christmas music on the radio ends, the season of self-improvement advertisements begins. This is the time of year where every gym, diet plan, and plastic surgeon is asking insistently: "Are you ready for a brand-new you?"

My response to this as a Christian is ambivalent. On the one hand, Paul tells us that "if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!" (2 Cor. 5:17) I believe that God's redeeming grace changes people. Speaking personally, I only wish God would change me more thoroughly.

But there is another part of me that resists this whole "brand new you" thinking that accompanies New Year's resolutions. Far be it from me to discourage you from trying to live in a healthier way, to be a better partner or parent, to be more mindful of the daily experience of life. These are laudable goals.

But why would you want a "brand new you?" Because you imagine that you are defective? Because you don't conform to what someone else expects of you? Because you don't conform to the cultural norms of beauty or sexuality or success? These are not motivations to improve; these are lies that deny your God-given goodness.

The you that is lumpier than you wish is still a good you.

The you that is not going to afford an Instagram-worthy Caribbean vacation is still a good you.

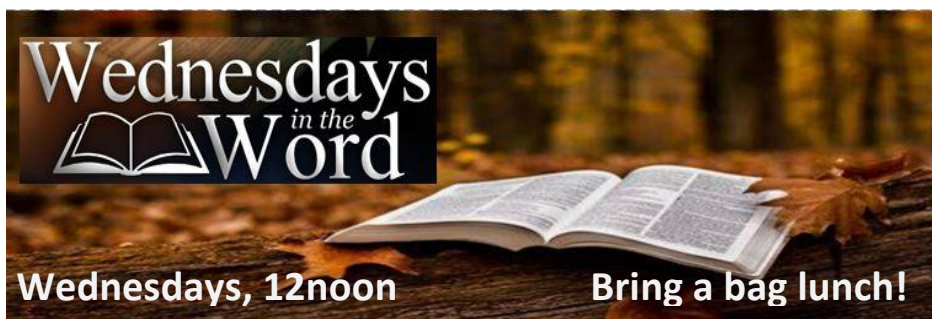
The you that is not girly enough or manly enough to satisfy "them" is still a good you.

You, just the way you are right now, are:

- a creation of the God who loves you and became flesh to redeem you
- a temple of the Holy Spirit (good enough for God to live in!)
- a unique child of God deserving of dignity.

We could be better: better behaved, better in our relationships, better stewards of our health. But don't let the room for improvement be twisted into a shame-filled hatred of yourself. God loves you as is. If God loves us, we can love ourselves.

Prayer: Forgive me; when I imagine being a "new me," most of the time I am really wishing to be someone else. Give me grace to become more fully who you have made me to be. Amen.



Come share a time of fellowship and discovery as we continue to delve into the book of Romans on Wednesday, January 12. Each Wednesday at noon you can bring your lunch and your curiosity about Paul's most intriguing letter. Feel free to drop in whenever your schedule allows.

Taking a Compliment

“Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory; because of your love and because of your faithfulness.”
(Psalm 115:1)

My mother would be ashamed of my bad manners.

A few weeks ago, I celebrated a baptism in church for the daughter of a man whom I had baptized and whose father was an old friend from my first church. Most of the people attending the baptism were unknown to me and unfamiliar with the church.

While I was standing with a fixed, camera-ready smile on my face, the woman who had been arranged next to me for the photograph said, “This is really a beautiful church!” to which I said, “Yes, it really is lovely, isn’t it? And they have kept it like new.”

My mother taught me that when someone pays you a complement you say, “Thank you.” I think the woman who made the complement about our building was also expecting either a “thank you” or at least an “aw But, without a thought, I simply agreed. It was a compliment, but not to me. Accepting her complement would feel like taking credit for someone else’s work. (Think about it Mom, would you take a compliment for a cake you didn’t bake?)

God created humanity and pronounced it “very good.” God looks at us and says: “very good.” Maybe, we should forget our manners and just agree with God: “Yes, I am; I had a great creator.”

Prayer: *Give me grace to see myself through your eyes, to admire what you’ve made (even though I haven’t kept the place up). Amen.*

-Pastor Lynn



*Jeff Cotton; Jane Duewiger; Robin Federmann; Ken Haberman; Paul Hayes;
John & Karen Kaitanowski; Ron Larson; Jewell McFarland; Barbara Middaugh; Jean Roth;
Peggy Scales; Helen Wilson*

If you have a prayer request, please contact the church office (649-1532) or Pastor Lynn (866-3085) or fill out a Prayer Request card on Sunday (located in pews) and place in the offering plate. Your recipient of prayer will appear in our bulletin & newsflash for a couple of weeks.

You may also ask for prayers from those on our prayer text/phone chain. Call/text Michelle (245-1692) or Pastor Lynn to request more urgent prayers. You are also invited to be a link on this confidential text chain, committing to pray for those entrusted to our care with prayer.

If you or a loved one is interested in receiving communion at home, please contact Pastor Lynn (866-3085; pastorlynn@stmattsucc.org). He would love to visit and offer the sacrament.



Congratulations to Mr. & Mrs. Aaron Ertel!

On January 1st, Aaron and Sydney (Breton) began 2022 by saying "I do".

No Kin of Mine

When my sister came home from Cornell on Christmas break during her freshman year, I overheard her address our mother as “Marjorie.” It was perfectly accurate; Marjorie was our mother’s name, but it still struck me as all wrong. I suspect it must have struck my sister as wrong too, because after she had tried it out a couple times, she reverted to “Mom.” (My mother, not known far and wide for quiet indulgence of her children’s foibles, uncharacteristically never made a peep of complaint about her daughter addressing her by her first name.)

There may be nothing wrong with grown children addressing their parents by their given names, but it sounds awkward to me. I know I’m probably old-fashioned, but even though children and parents are equal in value, they are not equals in rank. And long after we need to ask permission to stay out late or borrow the car keys, I think we still owe a certain deference to parents.

How one should address parents is not the focus of my reflection. Rather, what’s on my mind is the so-called “kin-dom of God.” You may be happily unaware of this turn of phrase, but it is gaining purchase in some parts of the church.

I understand the rationale behind using “kin-dom” of God instead of “Kingdom” of God. The changed wording is trying to remind us that within the family of God we are all equal in dignity and worth. Lots of harm has been done though the abuse of power. Not surprisingly, this has led to a healthy suspicion of hierarchies in the church and in general

I get all that, but renaming the Kingdom of God has a side-effect that I find unacceptable. While all are kin within the family of God and of equal rank with one another, we are not equal in rank with Christ. Christ is the sovereign (the King, if you will) and we are members of his Kingdom. If the sexist language (King=male) is troublesome, we could speak of the reign of Christ or the sovereignty of Christ, just so long as we are clear with ourselves that we are not equals with the Ruler of the Universe.

All of our talk about Jesus as our “best friend” is great in that it reminds us of the intimacy we can have with Christ, but we have to guard against casual familiarity. Friendship with God must include reverence and awe for the Divine who has graciously admitted us to this relationship.

We pray to a heavenly Parent who will always be infinitely more than we can imagine. There’s a reason why the biblical authors stress the importance of “the fear of the Lord.” That ‘fear’ does not mean cringing in dread of a capricious tyrant, but the overwhelming sense of one’s finitude and limitation in the presence of the God who calls worlds into being with a word.

Before this One, I kneel.

Prayer: *Almighty God, forgive the ways in which I rebel against your sovereign rule over my life – when I forget that you are God and pretend that I am. Amen.*



January Birthdays

Clayton Errington (1/4), Donn Mergenhagen (1/4), Bill Asboth (1/8), Kim Hamm (1/14), Jane Duewiger (1/17), Jewell McFarland (1/20), Sharon Mooney (1/20), Gail Burdick (1/21), Barbara Middaugh (1/26)

January Anniversary

Tracy Meyers & Marna Pritchard (January 22, 1985)



Thank you to the Council and all the St. Matthew's family for the many gifts lavished on Sandy and me for Christmas. They were each appreciated in their own (often fattening) ways. Together, they are a vivid reminder of the gift I have every day of serving you, and the gift we share of mutual love in Christ. Thanks again! May God continue to bless us all in the new year.

– Pastor Lynn and Sandy

I wish to extend my gratitude and thanks to Council and the congregation of St. Matthew's for your thoughtful and generous Christmas gift. Your support and kindnesses are appreciated and valued as I continue to work at a job I love, for people I care so much about, and for the God who blesses us.

May you all have a healthy and happy New Year! See you in 2022!

-Michelle

A small note of big thanks to Brenda Carver who gives of her time and energy to help us in the office, especially around holiday time when it's most crazy. This year, Brenda jumped in to help last-minute when one of us (Michelle) had to be quarantined the week of Christmas. We appreciate everything she does for us and the church throughout the year.

Pastor Lynn, Michelle

Thank you to everyone who donated items to complete a Welcome Kit for a newly arriving refugee family. We will be sorting and organizing the items in preparation for delivery this month. Look for photos of volunteers next month.

The Hospitality Committee dropped off 210 Christmas cards for the residents of Autumn View on behalf of St. Matthew's family and friends. Thank you to everyone who donated Christmas cards.

We received a nice thank you note from Amy McKnight, the Activities Director for Autumn View.

Thanks again,

LaDonna Painter

Hospitality Committee: Brenda Carver and Judy Meegan



St. Matthew's has received Thank You notes from the local missions we made donations to in 2021 from Missions or Fundraising or Hospitality Committees:

- ◆ FeedMore WNY Foundation (Meals on Wheels)
- ◆ Friends of Night People
- ◆ Warm the Children
- ◆ Ten Lives Club
- ◆ #FeedHamburg
- ◆ Plymouth Crossroads
- ◆ Massachusetts Avenue Project
- ◆ Churches In Action

Thank you for your continued generous support of the day-to-day operations and ministries of St. Matthew's.

Your financial support for St. Matthew's is needed. The disruption of the pandemic has been hard on our budget and so, if you can, please make a gift to support the ministry of St. Matthew's. You can send your donations by mail, or use your bank's online bill paying utility, or by giving online at St. Matthew's website.



Time balls were invented to help sailors. Long before it was used on New Year's Eve, a ball on top of England's Royal Observatory in Greenwich was dropped at 1 p.m. every day (starting in 1833) to help ship captains coordinate their navigation equipment.

In Costa Rica, at midnight, it's tradition to grab a suitcase and run around the block in hopes of traveling in the new year.



On December 31, 1904, The New York Times threw a street party, where else but Times Square. It was a huge hit and became an annual tradition. The custom almost died in its early days. In 1907, the city government outlawed that practice. So the Adolph Ochs, owner of The New York Times, replaced the pyrotechnics with a light bulb-studded ball of wood and iron and as we say, "the rest is history".

New Year's Trivia (answers bottom of page)

1. Who hosted the New York Eve's festivities in NYC until 1970's?
2. What famous group failed to pass a try out for Decca Records on January 1st?
3. Ads for what product were banned from American TV on January 1, 1971?
4. What movie generated the highest box office sales for one show on New Year's Day?
5. What is the geometrical shape of the Waterford crystal ball that is dropped in Times Square on New Year's Eve?

*Fun Facts & Trivia submitted by LaDonna Painter
Wishing you a Healthy, Happy, and Safe New Year's!!! (Go Bills)
-LaDonna*

SHED YEARLY REPORT

As many of you already know, our little "shed" in the rear parking lot can be very busy. The shed is run by St. Pauly Textile. They provide the building and also collect the donated items once a week. Clothing and other useable items are separated and distributed to various organizations in need. The organizations pay a small fee for the items. St. Pauly then reimburses us (St. Matthew's) a small percentage for having the shed on our property.

Through the efforts of our congregation and the local community, we generated a 2021 profit in the amount of \$1,114.23.

"THANK YOU" to all who "cleaned out" your closets and donated!!

God Bless,
Nancy Jankowski



New Year's Eve Trivia Answers:

1. Guy Lombardo hosted for the first 50 years, then Dick Clark took over as host.
2. The Beatles
3. Cigarettes
4. Avatar
5. Geodesic sphere (20 sides)

St. Matthew's United Church of Christ

5289 McKinley Parkway

Hamburg, NY 14075

www.stmattsucc.org



For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord; plans to prosper you and not to harm you; plans to give you hope and a future.

-Jeremiah 29:11