

December 31, 2006
Christmas 1

"Facing a New Year with Jesus as Your Brother"

HEBREWS 2:10-18

In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering. ¹¹ Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers. ¹² He says, "I will declare your name to my brothers; in the presence of the congregation I will sing your praises." ¹³ And again, "I will put my trust in him." And again he says, "Here am I, and the children God has given me." ¹⁴ Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death-- that is, the devil-- ¹⁵ and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. ¹⁶ For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. ¹⁷ For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. ¹⁸ Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

When you enter into a strange and unfamiliar place, it sure helps to have someone with you who knows the place and really cares about you. If I were to take a canoe trip in 2007 into the famous Boundary Waters of Northern Minnesota, I would fear getting lost in a maize of lakes, streams and pine forest that all look the same. However, if my brother Charlie were there with me, I would have no fear. After numerous outings with various church groups, he knows the Boundary Waters like the back of his hand.

2007 is right around the corner. We are going into uncharted waters. Who knows what the future will bring for our country with the wars in the Mid East. Who knows what may happen to our health, and what problems may come to people that we love. And who knows what serious challenges and tests might come to your Christian faith. Satan is certainly not going to let up on you and me after we greet each other with "Happy New Year!"

Jesus knows what is around the corner. He already sees through the maize and confusion of life that faces each of us. According to the words just read to you Jesus is not ashamed to call you and me his brothers and his sisters. He will be there for us, always there for us. "Though devils all the world shall fill, All eager to devour us. We tremble not, we fear no ill, They shall not overpower us." May the Holy Spirit bless us today as we find peace and comfort in "Facing the New Year with Jesus as Our Brother."

Jesus is not ashamed of us

It is amazing that Jesus is not ashamed to say that he is our brother, even though we have done shameful things this past year. Think of the top ten worst things you have done this past year, including evil thoughts in your heart and mind. Would you like these sins put on

a list and posted on the door of your refrigerator, or included on a new blog page you have developed for yourself, or sent as an e-mail to everyone on your email list?

Why would Jesus ever say that he is not ashamed to be our brother considering how we have lived our lives? The answer is found in here in Hebrews 2 where it says, "In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering." The reason Jesus is not ashamed of you is because your heavenly Father has brought you to glory by making Jesus the author or source of our salvation perfect through suffering. Just as Adam was the source of our sin, Jesus is the source of our salvation. He made himself the source of our perfect forgiveness and peace with God through extensive suffering for our sin. "The Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all." "The punishment for our peace was on him." I cannot imagine Jesus caring about a person like me, until I hear him cry out from the cross, "It is finished!" I realize then that he offered the perfect payment for everything in my checkered past and your checkered past so we could be elevated to the highest position of the universe, sons of God, brothers and sisters together with Jesus.

Time magazine picked its person of the year and it was you. The reason Time picked you is because modern 21st century people are totally absorbed in themselves. Do you know people set up web pages for themselves, where they blog and tell the world what they are doing each day as if they were the most important people in the universe? The motto seems to be to conceal the bad and brag about the good. The life of a Christian is totally different. We confess the bad, and we hide the good, because even our best is not good enough for God. Our only hope of glory and acceptance and love is the perfect suffering Jesus offered for us.

Jesus is not ashamed to call you his brother and sister because now you are part of his family. "Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers." In the early part of the last century a man was walking in a park and he noticed a scrawny little boy carrying another child on his shoulders. He said, "Son, isn't that a big load for a little fellow like you." He responded with the words, "He ain't heavy mister, he's my brother." That off course became the words of hit song by the Hollie's in the 1960's and the trademark of Father Flanagan's Boys' Town in Nebraska. Jesus is not ashamed to call you his brother and carry you on his shoulders.

In fact, Jesus already spoke his loving thoughts about you as a brother and sister he loves way back in the Psalms as we hear in our text: "I will declare your name to my brothers, in the presence of the congregation I will sing your praises." Psalm 22 begins with the familiar words of Jesus crying out from the cross, "My God, my God why have you forsaken me." It also includes these grand and glorious words of the risen Christ saying to his heavenly Father that he wanted to declare the praises of the heavenly Father to my brothers and sing about it in the congregation of brothers and sisters.

How many times will Jesus sing the praises of your heavenly Father to you in this coming year? Romans 8 says that we have the Holy Spirit who testifies to us that we are God's dear children. From the right hand of the Father Jesus will direct the Holy Spirit to comfort you, because he is your brother and no longer ashamed of you. From the right hand of the Father Jesus will send people into your life, give you devotional books, help you read the Scriptures so you realize how much you are loved and part of a kingdom that lasts

for ever. Joyfully Jesus stands in the midst of the congregation and says to his heavenly Father, "Here am I, and the children God has given to me."

Do you realize dear Christian how excited and thrilled Jesus is to be your brother? He is not ashamed of you, not because of what he sees in you, but because of his perfect suffering that has now declared you perfect and holy in his sight. Because of Jesus, you don't want to live a shameful life that discredits what he has done for you. You want to turn over a new leaf. You want to make resolutions not based on what you want for yourself, but what gives Jesus the glory. As Paul said, "The life I live I live for Christ who loved me and gave himself for me."

Jesus will always be there for you

Because Jesus is not ashamed of you, he will always be there for you. "Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death-that is the devil- and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. For surely is it not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants." Angels don't need help, but Abraham's descendants do. We believe as Abraham did that we are covered by a righteousness outside of themselves. We need help as Abraham did, daily help. Jesus won the battle over the devil. He fulfilled the prophecy that said he would crush the devil's head. Yet Satan is powerful. He has the ability to tempt us to sin. How many times was he successful in your life in 2006? He has the ability to accuse us day and night before God's throne. He can bring up all the charges necessary to make us slaves to death and eternal punishment. Notice it says that Jesus "destroys him" and Jesus "frees us." It is Jesus who gives us hope for the 2007 as we are told in Romans 8, "We are more than conquerors through him who loved us."

Remember the climbers who were lost this past month while trying to climb Mount Hood? In its survival training courses people are told they can live 30 days without food, 3 days without water, 3 hours without shelter, 3 minutes without air, and only 3 seconds without hope. In Jesus your brother who have a hope that will not disappoint you whatever the future may bring. It is Jesus who said of his sheep, "No one will pluck them from my hand."

Does Jesus know your troubles and problems? The spiritual song said it simply, "No body knows the trouble I have seen, No body knows but Jesus." How well does Jesus know you? Look at the baby's foot on the front cover of your bulletin. Then look at the back of the bulletin and read again the words that tell you, "'For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and the he might make atonement for the sins of the people." In order to make atonement for sin Jesus had to become one of us. He even subjected himself to repeated temptation. In another chapter this book of Hebrews tells us that Jesus was tempted in all parts as we are, yet he was without sin. A hymn that we all love begins with the words, "What a friend we have in Jesus, All our sins and griefs to bear." This morning lets change the words a little. "What a brother we have in Jesus, All our sins and griefs to bear." My brother Jesus knows the temptations I face this coming year, because he went through them, tempted in all parts as I am.

When I was child, I remember being fascinated by a television program called "Broken

Arrow." The episodes were about a US soldier and his relationship with an Apache. They became blood brothers. They cut each other's hand, and held their hands together supposedly to let the blood flow between them. They were always there for each other. My blood cannot contribute anything to make Jesus my brother. His blood has done it all. It is a strong bond, an amazing bond, based on a covenant that he has made with his blood. He even allows me have his body with bread and drink his blood with wine to further strengthen that glorious bond of brotherhood.

A family was driving past a farmhouse where they saw the sign that read, "Puppies for Sale." The little boy asked his dad if he could have a puppy. The next day they went to pick out a puppy. The farmer opened the kennel door, the puppies came running out, and the farmer said to the boy with a smile, "Which one do you want?" That's the one said the little boy, pointing to a puppy with one leg that was twisted. "Why do you want this one said the farmer?" The boy pulled up his pant leg and showed him the brace on his leg and then said, "I think that puppy needs someone who understands him."

You don't face this New Year and all its challenges alone. You have Jesus, someone who understands you, someone who is your brother who had to be made like you, someone who is not ashamed of you. With Jesus as your brother you don't even have to wish each other "Happy New Year!" "Happy New Year" becomes a statement of fact, an every day reality because Jesus is your brother. Amen.