

New Year's Eve

December 31, 2015

**Sermon Text:** Hebrews 13:5-8

Do you like change? I mean, we do live in a changing world. If you compare life today with life a century ago, it would be difficult to deny that the world has indeed changed. Consider how technology has changed in just the past 20 years! [Little] desktop and laptop computers have entered homes. The internet instantly connects millions of people all around the world.

Phones have left the wall, lost their cords, folded up into your pockets; they can take pictures and videos, guide you while driving, surf the internet— and still reach people by voice. The way many lived 100 years ago has drastically changed, has it not?

Despite the popularity of technology, you still do not need to change with it, do you? You may not have a personal computer (my grandparents still do not). You might have a [so-called] “dumb-phone” (which only makes phonecalls) instead of a smartphone. Perhaps you can only be reached by your land-line phone. You might write out a check, tuck it into an envelope, stick a stamp on the front, and then drop that bill off in a mailbox. Sometimes you can resist change.

Yet, what do you do when life forces change on you? What happens when your health forces you to change your lifestyle and normal routine? How do you heal when the number of people living in your household suddenly shrinks? How do you live when your long-held beliefs suddenly becomes a minority viewpoint? Where do you turn for comfort?

As we change from 2015 to 2016, we go to the One who does not change. **JESUS CHRIST REMAINS THE SAME!** *Yesterday, Today, Forever.*

God emphasizes that point. **[He] has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”** God makes the point even stronger in the original Greek wording. He uses *five* negatives (something English does not do often) to stress that something is absolutely impossible for him to do. Quite literally God says: “I will never ever desert you [it is impossible to do so], nor will I ever forsake you [it is impossible to do that].” He cannot stress the point any more than that, can he? When God promises something or says he will act, he never breaks his Word. In fact, God says that it is impossible for him to lie ([Numbers 23:19](#)).

**Hebrews 13:5-8**

<sup>1</sup> God has said,

“Never will I leave you;  
never will I forsake you.”

<sup>6</sup> So we say with confidence,

“The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid.  
What can man do to me?”

<sup>7</sup> Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. <sup>8</sup> Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

So then, does that always put your anxieties to rest? When you watched world leaders flex their muscles and flaunt their decisions in the face of our nation, did you instantly remember that God had not left you? As terror ripped through streets, again reminding you just how fleeting life can be, did you remain still because you knew that God had not forsaken you? When you heard laws passed which only added more struggles to your already struggle-filled-Christian-life, did you rest knowing that God was still with you? As you laid your loved one to rest and your family still came to grips about life without their loved one, did you find refuge in your ever-present God?

You hear God say: **“Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you”**—and sometimes it seems more like a wish than it does a promise. You look back on 2015 and remember the times where it looked like God did leave you and forsake you. You may see the times when you felt that as life changed and nothing was going to give you comfort; you would suffer all alone. You might recall the feelings of loneliness, where it felt like God was lying, that he was never with you in the first place.

If you ever feel like God has forgotten about you because he really has no interest in you, then look back to this promise: **“Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”** Your God seeks to calm and soothe your fears by reminding you that this is not the first time he made this promise. Did you catch that? Our sermon reading tells us: **[God] has said...**, meaning that he spoke these words at least once before. In fact, it is difficult to find a direct quotation of this verse because God has said it more than once! In the Old Testament you see Jacob running for his life. His brother Esau is out to kill him. In the midst of life and death, God appears in a dream, promising never to leave Jacob ([Genesis 28:15](#)). Another time, the nation of Israel is at a crossroads. They are on the cusp of entering the Promised Land. Yet, Moses just died; Joshua would be their new leader. There would be changed in leadership. Yet, God promises never to forsake his people ([Deuteronomy 31:6,8](#)). Then God turns to Joshua and promises that no one will ever stand against him, his leadership, his army, or his own nation ([Joshua 1:5](#)). Centuries after Israel entered their land, they began building a temple for God. King David started collecting an offering for the project. He then turns to his son Solomon and tells him to finish building the temple; God will remain to bless his directions, his working force, and the completion of the building ([1 Chronicles 28:20](#)).

God has promised never to leave or forsake his people. You have the added benefit of living years after these promises are first made. That means you have seen that God did keep his Word; he never left his people. Jacob was never killed; he lived a long life and saw his children and grandchildren grow up. Israel entered their Promised Land under Joshua’s firm leadership. Solomon’s completed temple stood for hundreds of years.

As you look back on this past year, you see how God has remained with you. He set your eyes to trust in him through his Word. You see a baptismal font which reminds you of your forgiveness. You receive Jesus’ body and blood, assuring you of your forgiveness.

As you look back on 2015, you see that **JESUS CHRIST REMAINS THE SAME yesterday!** As you stand just hours away from the beginning of a new year, you are reminded that **JESUS CHRIST REMAINS THE SAME today!**

How can you say that? Because Jesus has remained your Savior who loved you with such inexpressible love. You see that today. Your God comes to you day after day with Word and Sacrament, professing his love for you. You see a cross and you are reminded that your Savior gave his life for all those times it seemed like God did not care enough about your life. That cross is a testimony that God does care about the things you go through. Then he rises from the dead to tell you about the new life that is now yours.

Then he gives you a promise that has been in effect and that still stands in effect. He will never leave you or forsake you. If you are going through a trouble right now, he does not run away because the danger is too great. If sadness still tugs at your heart, your Jesus does not leave because someone else has a bigger problem. If you anticipate challenges, your Jesus will never desert you. He will never leave in the middle of a difficult situation. He will always be there to answer your prayers, deliver you from evil, and hold you in the palm of his hand ([Isaiah 41:10](#)). God himself has said that he will never abandon you in the middle of trouble. What God promises is as good as done; he will always remain beside you.

For all those times you may be afraid of what is coming, your God is more than eager and willing to stand in front of you and confront it face on. So, you can **say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?"** Did you catch that? God is your helper, someone who assists you in your time of need! God loves you so much that he remains continually concerned about the challenges you are facing. Because God helps you, you have need not fear! You have the certainty that your trust will not be put to shame. To say it another way, if God kept his promise to always remain with his people, will he keep that promise with you—or is this the year he finally breaks his guarantee?

Today you see God's loving hand still caring for you. **JESUS CHRIST REMAINS THE SAME today!** As you go home, when you watch the ball in Times Square light up a new year, stand assured that **JESUS CHRIST REMAINS THE SAME forever.**

In fact, our sermon reading looks forward by looking backwards. That is right; you gain confidence by looking back into the past. God says: **Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.** You may have Christian parents who used every opportunity they had to bring you to God's house so that you may know Jesus better each day. You may have that Christian spouse, who in the midst of a changing world, continues telling you that God has everything under his control. You may have that dear Christian friend, who even in the face of death, tells you that heaven is our eternal home.

You look back on these Christian role models. You do not imitate their characteristics, but rather you imitate the reason for the confidence they had. You see, Christians throughout the ages have sat where you sit now. They too entered many new years. Fears entered their lives; doubts knocked on the mind's door. No matter what erupted in life, they trusted in God's guaranteed promises. The God who promised never to leave them or forsake you is the same God who still promises never to leave or forsake you.

So, as you look back on those who walked through the valley of the shadow of death and into heaven, you can look forward with the same confidence as you walk through this life because their Jesus is your Jesus—the One who remains the same!

Yes, you do not know what the new year will bring. You do not know if life will get better or worse. You do not know what unexpected surprises will come or if something will become a new routine in life.

What you do know is that life does change. 2016 is an election year—a year where a new president will be elected. National politics will be affected. World leaders will take notice. Policies out of Washington D.C. will affect your income and taxes. 2016 is another year. You will be another year older. That means another year closer to graduation. Another year closer to retirement. Another year deeper into retirement. With the passing year comes the unknown of how your life will be affected.

Regardless of what the future holds, you know Jesus holds the future—and he will never leave you or forsake you. Why? Because **JESUS CHRIST REMAINS THE SAME** *yesterday, today—and forever.*