

"EMBRACE THE WORLD"
By Rom A. Pegram (12/31/17—New Year's Eve)

Let's begin today with our story from God's word...

Eight days later, when the baby was circumcised, he was named Jesus, the name given him by the angel even before he was conceived. ²² Then it was time for their purification offering, as required by the law of Moses after the birth of a child; so his parents took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. ²³ The law of the Lord says, "If a woman's first child is a boy, he must be dedicated to the LORD." ²⁴ So they offered the sacrifice required in the law of the Lord—"either a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons." ²⁵ At that time there was a man in Jerusalem named Simeon. He was righteous and devout and was eagerly waiting for the Messiah to come and rescue Israel. The Holy Spirit was upon him ²⁶ and had revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen the Lord's Messiah. ²⁷ That day the Spirit led him to the Temple. So when Mary and Joseph came to present the baby Jesus to the Lord as the law required, ²⁸ Simeon was there. He took the child in his arms and praised God, saying, ²⁹ "Sovereign Lord, now let your servant die in peace, as you have promised. ³⁰ I have seen your salvation, ³¹ which you have prepared for all people. ³² He is a light to reveal God to the nations, and he is the glory of your people Israel!" ³³ Jesus' parents were amazed at what was being said about him. ³⁴ Then Simeon blessed them, and he said to Mary, the baby's mother, "This child is destined to cause many in Israel to fall, but he will be a joy to many others. He has been sent as a sign from God, but many will oppose him. ³⁵ As a result, the deepest thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your very soul."

³⁹ When Jesus' parents had fulfilled all the requirements of the law of the Lord, they returned home to Nazareth in Galilee. ⁴⁰ There the child grew up healthy and strong. He was filled with wisdom, and God's favor was on him. – **Luke 2:21-35; 39-40 (NLT)**

Have you ever felt *overwhelmed* by your New Year's resolutions? Maybe you'll identify with the words of this Midwest pastor, who writes...

*I have pounds to lose and weights to use and
stacks of books to read.
The basement needs attention and the garden's
filled with weeds.
The back deck needs some varnish.
My cracked tooth needs a crown.
I have so much that I need to do
I think I'll go lie down.*

'Ever feel that way? Being *overwhelmed* by what we *should* be doing, though, is no reason to *not* roll up our sleeves and get started! Lying down means giving up. And that's certainly *not* what the New Year needs...

So, put your pen to the paper and come up with that annual 'to-do' list. Most likely, your list will have to do with ... *finances*, ... *fitness*, ... *family*, ... and *faith*. And,

hopefully, coming out of this Christmas season that we've been in together will make you want to make Christ-like connections ... even on into the New Year—you know, reaching out and touching people the way that Jesus did. And, I believe *this suggestion* to be Christ-like, *if* done in the Spirit of Christ. To your list of New Year's resolutions, I want you to add just one more thing...

HUG MORE OFTEN! Did you know there are documented advantages to hugging?

Hugging is *healthy* ...

- It helps the body's immune system.
- It cures depression.
- It reduces stress.
- It aids sound sleep.
- It's invigorating.
- It's rejuvenating.
- It has no unpleasant side effects.

Still not convinced? Then know this...

- Hugs are non-fattening.
- Hugs are non-taxable.
- Hugs are non-polluting.
- And, of course, hugs are fully returnable!

Theologically, *there's something about a hug that conveys a bit of God's grace*. Jesus told his disciples to go into the world, loving others the way he'd loved them, didn't he? Let me make it clear ... embracing the world with God's love is not simply done by passing out hugs, but it's a start. *The kind of friendship & approval symbolized by a hug signifies what it takes to win the world with God's love...*

Let me tell you about a man who—in my book—is a world-class 'hugger.' *His parents called him **Billy Frank**. His wife calls him **Bill***. His face is now drawn by the gravitational pull of his years. The wrinkles on his brow betray a life of hard work and stress. His legs are now weak; so, too, his arms. His hands tremble involuntarily. His voice, once strong, is now tired. He's an old man now...

For most of his 99 years (b. Nov. 7, 1918), this man has touched the world by holding before it the Christ of Christmas. And, Jesus knows the trembling hands that hold on to him with steadfast determination; he recognizes his faithful follower's tender touch. *He understands that the cause for which he came into this world is the same cause to which this frail fellow has committed his whole life*. Since embracing the Savior as a teenager, **Bill** has carried in his heart a concern for all kinds of people in all kinds of places. Since graduating from Wheaton College, this North Carolinian has walked his talk around the block and across the seas. Yes, **William Franklin Graham** is a living example of what it means to embrace others with the love of God. In **Billy Graham**, we see an elderly (but, nonetheless, enduring) hugger of humanity...

And, folks, *that's what God's calling us to be in this New Year*, did you know that? A *hugger of humanity ... for Him! That's why I'm asking you to add several hugs to your list of New Year's resolutions!*

So, is it burning in your heart yet ... to share the love of God with others around you? 'In your community? 'In your place of work? 'In your home? 'With your family? The desire to share God in this way should be absolutely burning inside of you!

Folks, when we share at Christ's table together, we don't just break the bread and consume it for our own good. We eat at Christ's table in order to feed others. We don't just take the cup from Christ and drink it for our own nourishment ... but, we're to pass it on to others that they might know Christ, too...

So, *how do we do that in the New Year?* The same way Simeon did—BY ALLOWING OUR LIVES TO BE LED BY THE SPIRIT OF GOD! Here are some things we need to learn from Simeon today...

SIMEON SEEMED TO BE IN THE RIGHT PLACE AT THE RIGHT TIME. How many of you can claim that that's the story of your life? It hasn't always been my story either ...

Folks, Simeon didn't *live* at the Temple. He lived in Jerusalem, but his home address wasn't the same as the Temple. Scripture tells us that for a time he waited and waited for the coming of the Messiah. God had promised him that he would not die before he saw Jesus with his own eyes...

Now, enter Joseph and Mary and their son, Jesus. They came to the Temple, as good Jews, to do what the Law commanded of them at the time of the birth of a son. It was a ritual. It took only a set amount of time to accomplish in the Temple. And, they were probably not the only ones that day to go through this ritual with a newborn son. Yet, Simeon was there, in the right place ... and at the right time. Was this a coincidence?

When we follow the Spirit of God in this New Year, *we're going to begin to find ourselves in the right place at the right time*. Did you know that? God, when is the right time to share the Good News of Jesus with those in my neighborhood ... or at my place of work ... or even in my family? How do I know where to be ... and when? *God will lead you to be a 'hugger of humanity' in your world ... if you'll but open your life up to the leading of God's Spirit, like Simeon did*. Of course, Simeon was a good listener, wasn't he? There's the next lesson. Yes, Simeon seemed to be in the right place at the right time, but also...

SIMEON SEEMED TO HAVE A DIRECT LINE TO GOD. When we open up our lives to the Spirit of God, we can have a direct line to God too; did you know that? Knowing what God is leading us to do is matter of staying in tune with God ... like tuning in a radio dial, so to speak; can you think of it like that? But, how do we tune in to God; how do we *stay* tuned in to God? I'm glad you asked...

Since Simeon was a 'good, God-fearing man [who was] waiting for Israel to be saved,'

I'm sure of one thing; *he must have spent a great deal of time in the Temple*. For this was the place people learned about God and where they gained the wisdom of God. Here was where one connected with God regularly and heard the word of God. Was it the 'voice of God' that you wanted to hear? The Temple was the place to do just that...

Regular worship of God, folks, is what it takes to 'tune in' to God and 'stay tuned' to God. It's the same right here in Lomira and surrounding areas. Where can you hear the word of God regularly? Where can you go to learn about God and to gain the wisdom of God? Corporate worship is one way to 'tune in' to God ... or to have a direct line to God. *The truth is, our sanctuaries are still places where God speaks to his people ... if we want to be tuned in...*

One more way to 'tune in' to God is to spend time alone with God. As a God-fearing man, I'm sure that Simeon did just that. Another place to hear 'the voice of God' and get 'tuned in' is during your regular 'quiet time' with God—reading God's word ... and praying. How much quiet time have you scheduled with God in the New Year?

SIMEON SEEMED TO HAVE 'JUST THE RIGHT WORDS' TO SAY. Verse 33 confirms that with these words: "Jesus' parents were amazed at what was being said about him." Is *that* the way people feel about you; do you always have *just the right words to say* to those who need Christ the most? When we allow God's Spirit to lead us, we stay 'tuned' into God ... and the right words to say will be ours, too ... just when we need them the most...

Folks, Simeon was a 'hugger of humanity,' wasn't he? That's who modern-day Billy Graham reminds me of in this part of the Christmas story. Of all the people in the Christmas story, *Simeon distinguishes himself as the one person who clearly understood the identity of the Christ child*. Let me remind you of his noteworthy prayer: ²⁹ "Sovereign Lord, now let your servant die in peace, as you have promised. ³⁰ I have seen your salvation, ³¹ which you have prepared for all people. ³² He is a light to reveal God to the nations, and he is the glory of your people Israel!" (Luke 2:29-32, NLT). *For Simeon, it was clear the gift of salvation was at least a couple of things...*

- 1) It was *for everyone* ... including the Gentiles (us), and ...
- 2) It *wasn't to be hid* under a tree or conveniently shelved in a closet...

Folks, the implications of the Gospel—of this message—are clear! YOU can reach out in the New Year and face it *without fear!*

- When you've been touched *yourself* by CHRISTMAS, *you're then ready to embrace a world that remains clueless to what the stable accomplished...*
- When you've been touched *yourself* by CHRISTMAS, it doesn't matter if your hands quiver and quake from living *eight decades of life; even if it's hard to spread butter with a knife, the one thing you can spread easily is the love of God to a hurting world—your world...*

You just can't help yourself ... when you've been touched by CHRISTMAS...

Simeon, like Billy Graham, understood the heart of God. God didn't want to be just 'way out there somewhere'; rather, he wanted to be 'Immanuel,' God right here with US! Today, *are we clear about the heart of God?* Have we been touched by the Love of CHRISTMAS? *And do we understand God is now calling us to 'hug' the world for him—to share the CHRIST of Christmas with others? Folks, God has embraced us for all He's worth; it's now our time, in turn, to embrace the world God's given us to love... Add a 'hug' (or two) to your New Year's resolutions this year, won't you?*