

There was once a traveler who was walking from a village in the mountains to a village in the valley. As he walked along, he saw a monk working in a field, so he stopped and said to the monk, "I'm on my way to the village in the valley, can you tell me what it's like?"

The monk looked up from his labor and asked the man where he had come from.

The man responded, "I have come from the village in the mountains."

"What was that like?" the monk asked.

"Terrible!" the man exclaimed, "no-one spoke my language, I had to sleep on a dirt floor in one of their houses, they fed me some sort of stew that had yak or dog or both in it and the weather was atrocious."

"Then I think that you will find that the village in the valley is much the same," the monk noted.

A few hours later another traveler passed by and he said to the monk, "I am on my way to the village in the valley, can you tell what it's like?" "Where have you come from?" asked the monk.

"I have come from the village in the mountains." "And what was that like?"

"It was awesome!" the man replied, "No-one spoke my language so we had to communicate using our hands and facial expressions. I had to sleep on the dirt floor which was really cool as I've never done that before. They fed me some sort of weird stew and I have no idea what was in it but just to experience how the locals lived was great and the weather was freezing cold, which meant that I really got a taste of the local conditions. It was one of the best experiences of my life."

"Then I think that you'll find that the village in the valley is much the same," responded the monk.

Life is 10% what happens to us and 90% how we respond. Don't allow the challenges of life to take away your joy. There are lots of reasons to complain and be miserable if that's how you look at life. There are lots of reasons to be enthusiastic and joyful if that's how you look at life. How do you look at life? Do you look forward to 2020 with anticipation, or with dread? When this year is over, will you be looking back with joy, or with regret? I hope we all have a great year filled with joy.

Today our scripture teaches us that as Christians, we can look to the future with confidence and expect good things to happen to us.

1 Corinthians 1:4-5 says, "because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, for in every way you have been enriched in him." This year I believe that we are made rich through Christ Jesus in all things because God's grace.

However, we used to be pessimistic about our walk of faith. We have an enemy who tries to assure us that we have messed up, and that we *will* mess up. Many of us here have made many mistakes in the last year as Christians. The good news is that God says, "I want you to have hope in faith in 2020, I want you to have a new beginning, I want to do something new in your life."

Isaiah 43:18-19 says, Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.

We have to understand that God is more interested in our future than God is in our past. That is where we are going to spend this new year. God says, 'forget about your past. Forget about the former things. Don't think about it. Look at the new thing I am going to do.'

There were 3 prospectors who found a rich vein of gold in California during the gold rush days. They realized what a great discovery they had, and decided, "We've a really good thing going here as long as no one else finds out about it." So they each took a vow to keep it secret. Then they headed for town to file their claims and get the equipment necessary to mine the gold. True to their vows, they didn't say a word to anybody. They filed their claim, bought the equipment, and headed back to their mine. But when they did, a crowd of people followed them. And the reason was because the expression on their faces had given them away. Their faces were aglow in anticipation of the wealth that soon would be theirs. People knew that they must have found something very special. So a crowd followed them out of town.

Are you excited about things God will do for you in 2020? God does not want our past to keep us from enjoying the life that God gave us to live. God wants us to look forward to the future with hope and faith.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:2, "To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours."

As Paul calls Christians in Corinth saints, we are God's people. We are God's holy people. God loves us. God has a great plan for our lives. God is with us during hardships. God has given us everything we need to succeed. Thus, this new year, I am more optimistic than ever about the future of our church because I am confident about your life and mine in God's hand and God's care no matter what we might be facing.

What are you expecting in life? Are things going to be better or worse? Are they going to be the same? We have to trust God to help us in all circumstances. That is why we can be optimistic and give thanks in all circumstances. We don't need to depend on ourselves. Many people stumble and fall and then they get up and say, I just try harder! They are doing the same thing over and over and over and expecting different results. However, if we keep doing the same thing, then we will keep getting the same result. We can't change who we are, only God can do that. Success in the Christian life is not trying harder in our way, but living smarter in God's way. Let God take control of our lives.

**Your word of light and hope floods into our lives, O God.**

**We have lived in darkness, in despair and fear, doubt and strife. But on this day of celebration, you remind us that we are marked by you to be witnesses to your light of new hope.**