

## Promises and More for 2024

Being blessed with such a moderate and fulfilling New Year's Eve and day, I've resolved to see if I can't actually keep a resolution or two just once before God closes the book on my wonderful life. Not that mine is a life any more wonderful than many others, it's just that I got a shot at living in a human body in a blessed region of a blessed land with a history and a constitution more God-inspired and accomplished than perhaps any other nation in the world – except perhaps Israel.

First, let's talk thankfulness. Just realizing how many of the disasters reported on the news every day have missed us, should inspire songs of celebration, like this one from "As You Like It," *Under the greenwood tree/ Who loves to lie with me/ And turn his merry note/ Into the sweet bird's throat// Come hither, come hither, come hither/Here will we see/ No enemy/ But winter and rough weather.*

Here are a few disasters that missed Wahpeton so far: no ice storm, no drive-by shootings, no earth quakes, no wild fires, / no Vikings to disappoint us through the playoffs. I could easily fill the whole columns with troubles we didn't have to face. We too can sing, "Yes, we have no bananas/And our day-old bread has lasted for a week." Still, I also have some bad habits I've wanted to shed for a long time.

One is the impulse to put my curse on drivers I think want to take me out: 'Turn off those damned strobe lights, why are you speeding through the parking lot? You nut, that's a stop sign you just ran, If you drove any slower you'd clot.' etc. Lord, help me to adopt my good buddy, trucker, Charlie Green's response to stuff like this, "Bless 'em lord, they know not what they do." I make that vow, even though I know I'll break it before I get a block down the street.

Another bad habit of mine is self-absorption, while giving scant attention to the real troubles many others face – In Japan they’re digging people out from an earthquake, in Israel countless survivors are lamenting lost family members; at our borders, people longing for a new start are waiting, trying to keep their hopes alive, after having waded side by side with drug runners, pimps, and terrorists. Truly, “The world’s more full of weeping/ Than we can understand.” I’ve got a few issues that could prove fatal, but have you seen the little kids on the St. Jude ads? “How light and portable my trials seem now, when that which makes me bend/ makes so many others howl.” (*King Lear*)

So my resolution now is simply, “Lord help me stop whining and earnestly start praying for people enduring *truly* hard times.” And while I’m at it, help me abandon the notion that a drive-by prayer is sufficient to please God. His word says, “Be doers of the word and not just hearers, deceiving yourself.” In one of the Bible’s most convicting passages, Jesus says, “Just so much as you have done it unto any of the least of these, your fellow humans, you have done it unto me.”(Jesus)

And here’s one more tough resolution for me to keep: Lord purge from me all narcissistic, naked, self interest, and develop “the mind of Christ,” which Paul says we have. (I Cor 2: 16)

Jesus crossed The Sea of Galilee just to deliver a mad man. As of yet, I’ve seldom even crossed the street to help somebody. Jesus slept in perfect peace in the back of the boat most of the way across that stormy sea. He’s been sleeping in the back of my boat a long time too, because I’ve been slow to wake him up for fear people might think me some ‘do-gooder’ who can’t mind his own business. ‘I’d better just stay Minnesota nice; better safe than sorry.’

So, as Miley Cyrus might say, “Lord, looks like I’ve got my twerk cut out for me.” Thank heavens God saves by Grace and not by our performance, else precious few might merit salvation. But our only requirement is, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.” That means nearly everybody has a shot, even baddies like that thief, crucified next to the Lord. Such good news should inspire us all to spread the good news out of sheer gratitude.

Gene Pinkney for The Daily News 24-01-09-