

Goal: That the hearers live new lives in the promise of God through Jesus.

Hau'oli Makahiki Hou! For many, today is a time to forget about the past and look to the future. The problem is, the past doesn't like to be so quickly forgotten. Despite our resolutions and best efforts, it continues to haunt us and remind us of our past failings and hurts and struggles that refuse to be solved. And so the good feelings that a new year brings are often followed by the hangover of reality.

But for some, for Christians, for you and me, today is a time not to forget about the past, but to look to the past, so that we can face the future. Today, we remember the work of the One who holds the future in His hands, and that He came in the flesh to give us a future. On the eighth day of Christmas, the one who truly loves us gave the flesh and blood of His Son in circumcision under the Law, to be our Savior. (***“And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.” (Luke 2: 21)***)

Now, the circumcision of Jesus is easy to overlook, and many do. I mean really, what does the removal of such a small and insignificant piece of skin really matter? We should focus on the really big and important works of Jesus, right? But it does matter, because God said it matters. It matters because God's Word and promise were connected to it. Circumcision was the sign and seal of covenant in the Old Testament, of the faith of God's people in the promise given to Abraham, that one of his seed would be the Savior of the world. By circumcision, they remembered this promise and expressed their faith in it. By circumcision, they were marked as the people of God. By circumcision, God's promise to Abraham was extended to a new generation, who would live as Abraham did - by grace through faith in our good and gracious God.

God's people have always lived with the hangover of original sin, the sin of Adam passed down to us. It's a past we can't shake, no matter how hard we try. A past that not only haunts us, but also continues to effect us and our future, through the hurtful thoughts, words, and deeds, it creates within us. Circumcision was both the confession of this past and the hope of the future.

Last week, we remembered the fulfillment of the promise born on Christmas, but today Jesus begins the work He has come to do for our salvation. Jesus didn't have to be circumcised, but He was, so that in His circumcision, He would take our past and make it

His, and make His future ours. In His circumcision, Jesus is marked in union with us. Our place under the Law and its obligations is taken by Him so that He could fulfill all the Law perfectly in our place. Then He gives His life as a sacrifice for our sins, and He rises from the dead so that we would have a future that does not end at the grave but in heaven.

But today, we look back not only to the work of Jesus for us in His circumcision, we also to our own works - our sins of thought, word, and deed; our sins of commission and omission; the sins that haunt us, and the sin of our unbelief and doubt. We remember them not to torture ourselves or so we can resolve to do better, but so that we can confess them and in faith, cling to the forgiveness of God. His promise given to us no longer in circumcision but in the sign and seal that has replaced it: Holy Baptism. (***“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.”*** (Galatians 3: 27 – 29) As circumcision pointed to and joined the people of the Old Testament to the beginning work of Jesus, Baptism points to and joins us people of the New Testament to the completed work of Jesus in His resurrection. And by faith, what God done, He gives to us.

So we don’t forget the past but confess it! Our sins are forgiven and therefore forgotten by God! Which is far, far, better. And we can face the future in confidence. For we have a future promised by God. A future of grace, forgiveness, and life. A future not based on our strength, but His. A future where things may not always be easy, but which will be good. And in Him you live. In Him you die. And to Him you belong forever.

So make resolutions if you want this year. There’s nothing wrong with them. But ultimately live under the resolution of your Savior and His blood. His blood first shed for you in His circumcision. His blood later shed for you in His crucifixion. For that is the blood that forgives and changes you. What you are unable to do, He has promised to do in you. And relying on Him, you have a future different than the past. A future as sons of God. A future that has begun for you even now.

So we begin this year of our Lord 2012 in His name, the name put upon us in Baptism, the name by which we are saved. The name of the Lord. (***“The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.”*** (Numbers 6: 24 – 26)

The Lord who blesses you and keeps you.

The Lord who makes His face shine upon you and is gracious to you.

The Lord who lifts up His countenance upon you, and gives you His peace.