

*Happy are they who have not walked in the counsel of the wicked, nor lingered in the way of sinners, nor sat in the seats of the scornful! (Psalm 1:1)*

One of my (Western) new year's resolutions was to discipline my thoughts from turning away from the negative toward the positive. I wanted to discipline myself to stop negative thinking about people, events, the past, and the future. I adopted an old football training device—ten push-ups, on the spot, for violating my rule. I gave it up after a few days because I was doing so many push ups. It was great for building upper-body strength, but not so good for building godly character. Jesus reveals the gospel is the only way by which we are transformed: "Behold, I make all things new!" (Revelation 21:5/Isaiah 43:19)

In their wonderful book, *Streams of Living Water: Celebrating the Great Traditions of the Christian Faith*, Richard J. Foster (with the help of his wife Carolynn and the support of his colleague Lynda Graybeal) shares many stories of the gems that adorn the crown of Christ. He chose Augustine of Hippo as an example of the Evangelical Tradition to which the Lutheran Church aspires to belong. He quotes from one of Augustine's interactive sermons: "One loving heart sets another on fire." The evangelical goal—the gospel-goal—is not to stop thinking badly of people, events, our past, the future. The evangelical goal, the gospel fruit, is to love as Christ loves. For this, prayer is more effective than push-ups! There is the blessing of Psalm 1:1!

It is better to celebrate the new year with joy and thanksgiving instead of resolutions: resolutions can make us anxious. But the gospel makes us joyful and gives us peace. Happy Chinese New Year to all (Feb1-15) and blessings in the year of the (water) tiger! May the homes of our hearts be cleansed of all ill will by the gospel of Jesus Christ and by God's mighty power may we celebrate the eternal festival of light with the one who is the Light of the World!

Joy and peace in Christ Jesus,

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Pastor Ron Bestvater, sts