

bChristmas 1 ~ January 1, 2012 ~ A homily preached by The Rev'd Erl G. Purnell at Old St. Andrew's Church, Bloomfield, CT

Numbers 6.22-27; Psalm 8; Galatians 4.4-7; Luke 2,15-21

A new day and also a new year. Seems like just a minute ago that we welcomed 2011 and then, poof, gone. And wasn't Christmas just a millisecond ago? A lot happens in a week. The Christmas presents—a stunning center piece, apple jelly, a smallish assortment of cookies, photos of those grandchildren I spoke about on Christmas Eve. But also, warm fires in the fireplace, a beautiful tree, food for food. I feel so fortunate.

I also feel incredibly sad for the five who died in the Christmas morning fire in Stamford. How could that happen? How to go to sleep at night ever again, or to wake up for that matter to face the reality of the loss? Oh my!

Still considering loss, but on an entirely different level, have you heard what happened in the Samoan Islands on Friday? NOTHING! Absolutely nothing. The reason? The south Pacific island nation cancelled Friday completely. On Thursday at midnight, they went directly from Thursday to Saturday. Really, I'm serious. How would you like to cancel a day *just like that*?

Samoa, for years an American protectorate, oriented its trade and commerce east, that is, toward the United States. More recently, however, their most important economic ties have been to the west—namely New Zealand, Indonesia, and Malaysia. So, on Thursday, December 30th, they moved the international date line to their east, thereby placing the islands at the beginning of Saturday instead of Friday. Now, instead of being the last to celebrate New Years in any given year, they're the first. Moreover, they can conduct their business with their trading partners to the west on the same day. It saves a lot of people in Samoa from working on Sunday because it's Monday in New Zealand.

We cannot know what the new year—2012—will bring. However, if a couple of smart professors from Johns Hopkins have their way, the entire calendar system the world uses would change. They propose to have the same dates each year on exactly the same days of the week. Months would have 30 days, except every 3 months, there would be 31 days. The total number of days would only add up to 364 a year. Yikes! Where's the lost day go? Into a bucket? Kind of like a big Samoan solution every year. Just drop a day from the system.

These wise guys have a solution, though. Every 7 years, they'd take the accumulated days out of the bucket and add an extra week to the end of

December. Really, they're serious. The argument is that it would simplify all kinds of planning—school and baseball schedules for example. School would always start on the same date and day of the week and the Red Sox would always beat the Yankees on the same days. Your birthday and mine would be fixed. Bummer if it falls on a Monday, right?

The article I read didn't say what numbers would be used for the extra week—32-38? Maybe there could be a contest to name the extra 7 days with names, like Isabella or Fernando. I've got a suggestion if this proposed calendar idea gains momentum: the extra week is always a vacation week. That should get people behind the idea.

Perhaps you noticed the psalm today—Psalm 8. *“When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and stars you have set in their courses...”* The psalmist, correctly I think, understands the small place of humanity in the scheme of things: *“What is humanity that you should be mindful of him [sic]?”*

So, when we mess around with date lines and calendars, we're really not doing much. We've invented all that stuff for our own convenience anyway. The moon and stars are set in their courses and no matter what we do, that's not going to change where we are in our yearly journey around the sun.

Most of you know that I'm not a believer in God as puppeteer. The God of creation is not a capricious character “somewhere up there” who wreaks havoc indiscriminately with natural disasters, causes houses to burn on Christmas morning, or sets dates, calendars and time. The planets *are* in their courses and often enough we do face accidents of creation—earthquakes and storms—because that's the way things are. And, what we do and our reactions are a part of nature, too. We care, we love, we mourn, we work, laugh, play, ... and we die.

It seems to me that while we're here, we can either live into the awe of creation ... or futilely fight it. My own experience is that when we allow wonder and beauty to wash over us, the rough spots smooth out a bit. That's not to say we won't be devastated from time to time. It happens. But the good things happen, too ... like skipping Friday, December 30th in Samoa.

*Amen.*