In the name of the Father and of the † Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Does the Devil have a knee? ...you know, as in the spiritual “Dem Bones”¹:

Shin bone connected to the knee bone
Knee bone connected to the thigh bone...

So, does the Devil have a knee bone? Well, if he does, judging by this morning’s Epistle Lesson, the Devil is going to have to bow that knee before Jesus. And so we come to this morning’s sermon text. It is from the Second Chapter of Philippians. St. Paul writes this:

9Therefore God has highly exalted him [Jesus] and bestowed on him the name which is above every name,
10that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:9-11, RSV)

Take that, Devil!

You know, it really was pretty outrageous when the Devil tempted Jesus about bowing down and worshiping him, the Devil! Jesus refused to do so. St. Matthew tells the exchange this way:

8Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them; ⁹and he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” ¹⁰Then Jesus said to him, “Begone, Satan! for it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.’” (Matthew 4:8-10, RSV)

I say that it was outrageous for the Devil to tempt Jesus this way—for two reasons. First off, Jesus already owns all the kingdoms of this world and the glory thereof. In fact, he created all the wealth of the nations. To him, belongs all the gold and silver and “every beast of the forest and the cattle upon a

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dem_Bones
thousand hills” (Psalm 50:10). Jesus does not need to come begging to the Devil.

But there is a second reason why it was outrageous for the Devil to tempt Jesus to worship him: this second reason is that the Devil is destined to worship Jesus! Not the other way around. And if the Devil refuses to worship Jesus, nonetheless, the Devil is going to have to *bow his knee* before Jesus. There is no escape from that for the Devil.

This passage about “every knee” bowing before Jesus is one of my all-time favorite passages. I cannot swear that my interpretation of this passage is absolutely correct or even the only possible correct interpretation. But it is a meaning I came to long ago, and all my reading of the Bible since then has not yet convinced me that I got it wrong.

The great thing about this passage in Philippians 2 is that it is so universal. It presses toward everybody. Those geographical locations indicate every soul that has ever lived or will live:

> 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, *in heaven* and *on earth* and *under the earth*...

So, my happy reading of this text is that there is going to come a time when everyone is going to be able to do something many of them cannot yet do: They are going to acknowledge Jesus as being their Lord. Then there will be peace on earth. Then there will be a wonderful unity. There will be a harmonious cry going up to Jesus, “You, Jesus, are my Lord.” Neighbors and nations who nowadays argue with one another about Jesus are going to one day agree on one thing: Jesus is the Lord. The Devil too is going to have to agree to this. He will not like it. He will hate it. And I fear that for him it will be too late. The Devil and his best friends, that is, sin, death, and the Devil, are going to be tossed out of God’s kingdom, and they will trouble humanity no more.

This is the grand perspective I want us to bear in mind as we face this new year lying before us. I do not want us to be fighting on the wrong side this year. The Devil is going down! Do not take his side in any degree this coming year. Instead, be optimistic as you face this coming year. This stretch of your life coming up is your chance to place yourself on the side of the One before whom all humanity will one day bow the knee and acknowledge as Lord. And so, this stretch of your life coming up is your time to be optimistic about striving for good in the name of Jesus. It is a one thing to strive for the good when you think it is all rather hopeless. That is hard. But this year coming up is a stretch of life when you can strive for the good in the name of Jesus and say to yourself, “It will certainly be for the good. My good work this coming year will not be in vain, for I am on the path toward that great day when everyone bows the knee before Jesus and claims him as Lord.”
I was pleased to read a recent National Public Radio report about Americans being optimistic as they enter this new year, 2019. The title of the article goes this way:

Americans Are Optimistic About The Future — Just Don’t Ask About Politics

The opening line of the report gives the numbers:

A new NPR/PBS NewsHour/Marist Poll found that 60 percent of Americans are optimistic about the world in 2019, compared with just 37 percent whose outlook is less rosy. (That leaves 3 percent of the country as merely ambivalent, if you’re counting.)

The article points out that this is a significant jump from eight years. Back then, only 54% felt good going into the new year. Now it is 60%.

The article points to natural reasons for optimism: Jobs, health, and finances seem to be looking pretty good for many Americans. It turns out that people become blue when they discuss politics, but for many people that seems not to be enough to rob them of a basic optimism going forward.

This business of politics getting people down reminds me of a line in a song by Simon and Garfunkel — a song called “The Only Living Boy in New York,” back in 1970. The line goes this way:

I get the news I need
On the weather report
Oh, I can gather all the news I need
On the weather report

I mention this matter of the news cycle because there might be some rational and conscientious way for us to get the news without losing our hearts to the news. I mean, on most days we could simply read through the headlines in the New York Times and the Wall Street Journal, without actually immersing ourselves in most of the articles or editorials. Save that, save immersing ourselves in articles, until Saturday or something.

However that might be, I think it is great that many Americans are optimistic as we face this new year. And I think that Christians should be among them. Christians should be among those who are optimistic going forward.

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After all, we have a good reason for optimism. We are drawing closer to that day when all of humanity acknowledges Jesus as our Lord. That is going to be a good day. Fussing and fighting, betrayal and greed, all ignoble ways of life are going to fade away, but anything good we do this coming year in the name of Jesus is going to stand. Reality is on our side as we strive for the good, because Jesus is on our side.

A final note about that article about Americans being optimistic about this year now lying before us. It says that young people – Millennials – are likely to make New Year’s resolutions. Older folks tend not to make resolutions. The article notes that more than half of Americans under thirty are planning to make a resolution for next year, according to the poll. Meanwhile, just over a quarter of the over-60 crowd say they’ll turn over a new leaf with the new year. The article figures that for us older folks, perhaps we’ve given up. That, or [get this] we just feel that we’ve “reached perfection.” Unlikely!

Anyway, for people, old or young, who make resolutions, I say, good for them! The article reports that people who make New Year’s resolutions aim for wholesome things, like exercising more, quitting smoking, and eating healthier. But beyond these specific resolutions, there is another resolution I like: Close to 1 in 10 respondents has resolved simply to “be a better person.” That is pretty cool. They plan to make the world better by making themselves better.

And that is a good resolution for anyone who bears the name of Jesus. That is today’s festival: We are celebrating the Name of Jesus. As we go forward into this new year, let us try to go forth in both the boldness of that name and in the beauty of life appropriate for those who bear the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom belongs the glory, with the Father and the Holy Spirit now and forever. Amen.