

**A Day of New Beginnings**

**Rev. Karen Nyhart**

**Sermon**

**Jan. 1, 2017**

***Philippians 3:12-14***

***“Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. <sup>13</sup> Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, <sup>14</sup> I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.”***

**Happy New Year's!**

**It is hard to believe that it is 2017.**

**Christmas is over and a New Year is in front of us.**

**Lights and decorations are starting to come down and will be put away until next Christmas.**

**Winter break is almost over.**

**New Year's Day always makes me a bit melancholy.**

**I am always bummed that the holidays are over.**

**We usually spend time with family and friends over the holidays and I enjoy seeing them and having everyone home.**

**Now, it is time to get back to a somewhat normal schedule and think ahead to the New Year.**

**New Year's Day is a good day to start thinking about those New Year's resolution – things you want to leave behind and things you want to do in the New Year.**

**I usually start by reviewing the previous year.**

**Things that happened in my life – both good and bad.**

**Then I start making plans for the next year.**

**For instance, this past year my two daughters graduated from K-state –**

**Sarah in Elementary Education.**

**Rachel in English and Anthropology**

**To honor and celebrate their achievements I made 2 quilts for them.**

**This past Fall – I had a total hip replacement.**

The doctor was able to re-construct the hip area, put in a new ball/socket, and lengthen the right leg.

It is pretty amazing what doctors can do these days.

We also had some losses this year.

We lost some close friends this year to cancer.

It is also hard to believe that I have been serving here at Old Mission for 12 years now.

Today starts my 13<sup>th</sup> year.

What are your year-end reviews?

What are some of those good things and bad things that have happened in your life this past year?

Are you glad this year is over?

Are there things you want to leave behind or change?

Are you looking forward to a new year (2017)?

The scripture passage that I chose for today is Philippians 3:12-14.

I have chosen this passage as our 2017 New Year's scripture passage.

Here these words from Paul....

*"Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. <sup>13</sup> Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, <sup>14</sup> I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus."*

Philippians is a letter the Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Philippi.

The church was founded in about 50 AD, during Paul's second missionary journey.

Paul loved this church and rejoiced over its progress.

Paul wrote this letter while he was in prison to encourage them and to advise them.

This book is one of my favorite books in the Bible.

It seems that I quote from this book quite often.

Many of my favorite scripture verses come from this book.

Phil. 4:13 – "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

Phil. 4:4 – "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say rejoice."

Phil. 4:8-9 - "Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. <sup>9</sup> Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you."

...and today's passage from

Phil. 3:12-14 - "*Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. <sup>13</sup> Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, <sup>14</sup> I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.*"

When I first studied this scripture passage, I was in college.

I belonged to a women's study group that was made up of one college student (me) and 5 seminary students.

We met weekly to encourage one another, pray for each other and to study scripture together.

We used to refer to this scripture passage from Paul as the 5K passage.

We were sure that Paul was referring to running a race and that the prize wasn't a physical trophy, but the prize was getting to heaven.

But as I was preparing for today and thinking of the new year, this scripture passage kept coming up in my head.

I came to the conclusion as I looked closer at this passage that there was more to it than a 5K – or race.

It truly is a great scripture passage for the new year.

Paul mentions his relationship with Christ.

In this passage, he says, "Christ Jesus has made me his own".

Paul knew that he was a beloved child of God.

He knew without a doubt that God claimed him and loved him unconditionally. Paul also knew that relationships go both ways and that he still needs to grow and to work on his relationship with Christ.

Our relationship with Christ is very much like our relationship with each other. We have to continually work on our relationships and spend time with one another.

No matter how long you know someone, you can still learn something about the other person.

My in-laws have been married for over 50 years.

Shirley would always make brussel sprouts for Sy because she knew it was his favorite.

One day a few years ago, we were talking to them and it came out that Sy really dislikes brussel sprouts.

Shirley said, *"But I thought they were your favorite. Why did you keep eating them?"*

Sy said, *"I keep eating them, because you keep making them."*

No matter how long you have known someone, you can still always learn something new about them.

The same is true in our relationship with Christ.

We can always grow and learn something new in our relationship with Christ.

We just have to keep working at it.

Paul then says in this Bible passage, *"one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead"*

Maybe not forgetting what lies behind, but instead, leaving them behind.

There are some things we need to remember from the past like the mistakes we have made (so we don't make them again), the memories of the loved ones we have lost, the celebrations we have had...

Leaving them behind doesn't mean we forget, but it does mean that we are willing to move forward.

This past week, Scott and I had a chance to visit my sister and her family in Memphis.

While we were there, we visited the Belz Museum of Asian and Judaic Art.

In the Judaic art section, they had an area to remember the holocaust with photos and stories from some of the survivors.

One of those survivors was Simon Waksberg.

He was just 16 when Germany invaded Poland.

In July 1944, he was part of a group that was gathered up and put onto a train. The train was sealed and became very hot.

It took three days before they arrived at their destination.

When the doors opened, they found themselves at the Auschwitz concentration camp and half of the people on the train had died from the heat.

Months later, as the allied troops were advancing, 1000 prisoners (including Simon) were forced to do a 6-week march into Czechoslovakia and Germany.

Out of the 1000 only 150 survived to meet American liberators at the Flossenberg Concentration camp in Germany on April 23, 1945.

All of his family had perished.

Simon soon met a young woman named Mina, another holocaust survivor and they married.

Simon spent his life sharing his story with others, especially teenagers.

One of the things he was famous for saying was, *“Do not hate, hate will eat you up. Remember the past, but live for the future.”*

Remember the past, but live for the future.

Leave behind the bitterness, hatred, anger...

Leave behind the regrets, the mistakes that have been made...

Instead of living in the past, we need to be people straining forward to what lies ahead, pressing on towards the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

The prize isn't a physical thing or a reward to go to heaven like I had thought before.

Instead, the prize is the call from Christ to be in right relationship with God and with others.

It is to have compassion for others, to forgive one another, to do what is right, to stand up for the injustices, to serve others and to be involved in other people's lives.

That is what Paul means by the prize of the heavenly call.

We are called and challenged by Christ to love God and to love others as God loves.

I want you to think for a moment.

Who are the people that inspire you? Who are the ones that carry these traits and love as God loves?

Simon Waksberg is one of them for me.

After all that happened to him, he could have turned into a bitter, angry, hateful old man.

Instead, his famous response is this, *“Do not hate, hate will eat you up. Remember the past, but live for the future.”*

This is the first day of the New Year. A day of new beginnings.

What are the things you want to leave behind?

What kind of person do you want to be in 2017?

What are your goals for the new year?

Let's start off this New Year by starting anew.

This morning as you come up for Holy Communion, there will be three stations/tables for you to stop at and visit.

The first table you will go to is called – *“Leaving It Behind”*.

Earlier, you had a chance to write on the strips of paper given to you as you came in this morning to write a word or phrase of something that you want to leave behind as we start a new year.

As you come up to this station and when you are ready, take your slip of paper and put it into the bowl of water as a symbol of letting it go.

Leave that station knowing that your word or phrase is now gone and is now in the past.

By doing this, you are giving your word or phrase over to God, so you can begin anew.

Station two is *"Holy Communion"*.

As you come up for communion and take the bread and dip it into the cup -know that you are beloved child of God/a person of incredible worth - forgiven, worthy, loved and accepted.

There is a place at this table for all of us.

Through our sharing of the bread and cup together in the community of faith, we are brought into relationship with God in Christ Jesus as well as into a relationship of love for one another.

Sharing in communion is a means by which to fulfill our love for God and our love for people.

The last station is *"A New Year/A New Word"*.

When you come to this station take a card.

Then, when you return to your seats, look at the word on the card.

Take this word with you into the New Year.

For example, if this word is "encourage"— think of ways you have been encouraging to yourself and to others.

Then think of ways you can be more encouraging in the coming year.

Meditate on this word through-out the year.

Tape it to your bathroom mirror or refrigerator – somewhere in the house where you are going to see this word every day.

Make this word your (2017) word of the year and see where it leads you.

This is a day of new beginnings. A new year.

Let's start this New Year afresh – renewing our relationship with Christ and renewing our relationship with each other. Amen.