

HAS ALL BEEN COMPLETED? DECEMBER 30, 2007

Today is the second last day of 2007. It is both a time to look back on 365 days of events and living and a time to look forward to a new year. How we look back affects how we move forward and we need to think a bit about this at this time of the year.

The last copy of the Community Press for this year was delivered to my home. At first glance, I thought it was an old copy from another week as the story on the front was not new. Then I realized that it was a paper summing up the stories of my community in 2007. How soon we forget what seemed so important at the time we experienced it.

Macleans, Newsweek, The Economist, and others all put out copies of the year in summary. These are interesting to read as you are reminded of the events of this past momentous year. Equally interesting is the interpretation each places on these events and these interpretations can be similar or widely different from the others. Their opinion of the chief newsmakers can also differ.

It is fascinating how we can see the same series of events and feel so different about them and their impact. People react very differently depending on their experiences, location, history and cultural learning. We know from experience that siblings can interpret events very differently and react in divergent ways. Certainly we know that nations can interpret things from their perspective and national priorities and ambitions.

How do you feel about this past year? Has it been eventful or uneventful from your point of view?

Many people start off a new year with a set of New Year's Resolutions. The sense of a new year beginning makes one feel that change is possible. These new year resolutions may be mundane or profound. Common resolutions we hear or have made ourselves relate to losing weight, giving up smoking, being more attentive to others, paying off our credit cards, getting more sleep, finally taking that trip, etc.

How successful have you been with these resolutions? Have you just stopped writing these resolutions as it so often leads to failure and shows up your lack of resolve? I know I no longer write them which tells you my success rate.

In my second year of university, I went to live with my Aunt Eva and Uncle Sandy. They had no children. My aunt was a forceful woman and my uncle was quieter, having been a victim of gas in World War 1. One New Years, my aunt presented my uncle and I with a set each of new years resolutions. I thought my uncle was a saint of a man and yet he has some areas written down to strive to achieve. I was given a list which was close to a dozen resolutions.

Where is your list, I enquired of my aunt? None necessary she stated emphatically.

It is so much easier for any of us to list things others could work on to improve themselves and their interpersonal relations. It is harder for us to look in the mirror, see our shortcomings and make a resolution to work on these .

New years, time to look back and to look forward. You remember the story of Lot's wife and the escape from the cities being destroyed. She was warned by Lot not to look back or she would perish. As she ran forward, she had an overwhelming desire, perhaps a sense of nostalgia at all she was leaving behind, to look back one more time. When she did so, she turned into a pillar of salt and could go forward no more.

This story warns us of the need to take care as we move forward to not let the past get in the way of the future which lies ahead. Like Lot's wife, we are running forward not sure where the paths will lead. Suddenly the comfort of the past, even a past which has been painful and awkward, seems safer somehow. So our momentum forward slows down and we finally stop in our tracks to carry once again the burdens of the past, all our hurts, disappointments, frustrations, angers, injustices we felt, etc.

It is not easy to move forward resolutely without all the burdens of guilt we feel as we look at our relationships. Guilt is important as it causes us to look again at what we do and how we do it. However, guilt is also not helpful if all we do is add this guilt to the large bag of guilt we carry around with us always. We have to learn to forgive both others and especially ourselves. We need to learn to drop this load we carry and leave it to rest behind us.

St. Paul and St. Peter are among the role models we should remember. Peter was always annoyed at himself and ashamed at his cowardice in denying Jesus so often. He trusted Christ and yet faltered when Jesus called him forward to walk with him on the water. He denied being a follower of Jesus the night Jesus was arrested. He argued with God when he was invited to eat items which he felt were forbidden by the sacred laws.

Paul had actively gone out to persecute Christians and lead them to their death. He hated this Jesus of Nazareth, the imposter messiah. Then Paul was confronted by Jesus who asked him very simply this question. "Why do you persecute me?" For the rest of his life as he served Christ, Paul was able to assist others to drop their past, receive forgiveness, and walk as free men and women. Freedom from the chains of their past, for God's forgiveness is freely available is we accept this forgiveness and move on as a forgiven people. Paul stated to others: if Christ can forgive me and give me a role to lead his church, than he can forgive and use anyone.

Peter's story was similar. He was a powerful leader because he was so earthy, so human, wearing his emotions on his sleeve. He rejoiced at the new life offered to him and this message of hope and newness possibilities he preached all over his land. But Peter never forgot; he asked at his death to die not upright on the cross but upside down for he felt still unworthy to die as had his Lord.

The problem for many of us is to forgive and then get on with living, dropping our hurts, angers and slights. It is easier to forgive than to forget. It is unrealistic to expect to forget but we can take away the power of these events if we openly forgive someone and move to build in new creative ways. The Holy Spirit accompanies us on this journey to learn new ways to operate, to find ways to drop the past and eagerly look forward to the future.

When we determine to try harder to be the person God created us to be, we can easily slip into a dark mood which says: what difference will I make anyway even if I can change for the better?

All of us know the power of the individual for we have seen it on TV, in our community and in our family. Why can not this power for good be ourselves?

The message of Peter and Paul is just that: God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that we might have life and have it in abundance. At creation, God created us and saw that it was good.

Think back to the times you had a new baby in your arms, either yours, or a family member or a friends. You remember thinking of the new beginning this wonderful gift is experiencing, with potential that we can not even imagine. We see the look on the face of the parents or we experienced it ourselves as we beheld our child. In that blessed moment, you know there is a God who has given this gift of life, a life full of possibilities. To us has been entrusted this life. We will help to shape the attitudes this child carries for life. How much better it will be, if we never forget that moment when we witness the child with life ahead and do our best to enable rather than cripple the child to believe in the goodness of life.

New Years! 2008! How many of us thought we would be here to see this day? How many loved ones can we name who have gone from us as we face life in 2008 without them? How do we plan to go into the new year? Will we be fearful and pessimistic or will we allow excitement and curiosity to be our attitude.

God calls us all as his people to move continuously forward, thankful for all that has gone before but eager to see what God has in store for us.

In our lives, in our work, in our relationships, in our congregations God calls us forward. Remember that I am God. I am with you even to the ends of the earth and time.

Let us face 2008 with optimism, joy and yes, excitement for undoubtedly God has for us opportunities for service, friendship and love.

Thanks be to God. Amen

Rev. Gary Magarrell