

1<sup>st</sup> S. after Christmas 01/01/2023  
(New Year's Day)  
Phil. 3:13b-14 ILC/FELC/ZLC  
Pastor Huber

### “Looking Both Ways”

Our text for this New Year's Day Sunday is from this morning's **Epistle** lesson where St. Paul writes in Phil. 3, *“But one thing I do: forgetting what lies **behind** and straining forward to what lies **ahead**, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”*

When I was a youngster, eager to ride my bike out on our country **road**, my mom would always say, *“Now **remember to first look BOTH WAYS!**”* Because I read a lot of Greek and Roman **mythology** even as a kid, I'd occasionally wonder if **Terra**, the mother of **JANUS**, the Roman god with a face on each side of his **head**, ever bothered to warn **HIM** “to look both ways”. Our first month of **January**, of course, is **named** after this “**two-faced god**” with the ability to look **behind** him at the **PAST** year while simultaneously gazing **ahead** of him into the **NEW** year. In our **text**, the Apostle Paul is encouraging us believers to do much the **same** by forgetting what lies **BEHIND** while at the same time straining **FORWARD** to see what lies **AHEAD** into the new year that you and I enter this morning.

However, **DOING** that involves exercising two **mnemonic activities** that appear to be diametrically opposed to each other. In reality, they simply are two different **faces** on opposite sides of the same coin. We call them **FORGETTING** and **REMEMBERING**...and St. Paul seems to think there's an important place for **EACH** of them in his life, as well as in the life of us **believers**. In other words, there are things we need to **FORGET** as we enter this new year, and there are things we need to **REMEMBER** as we enter this new year. Unfortunately, many of us have certain difficulty implementing **EACH** of these things in our lives.

Speaking of **forgetting and remembering**, I came across a **substitute** for New Year's Day celebrations recently. Since **2006**, a large group of people now celebrate an important event on New Year's. Instead of “New Year's Day”, they refer to it as “**Good Riddance Day**”. Participants write down unpleasant, painful or embarrassing **memories** from the past year and throw them into an industrial-strength **shredder**! You can also take a **sledge hammer** and **smash** your “good riddance” item...like a **cell phone**, for instance. It's patterned after a Latin American tradition in which New Year's revelers stuff **dolls** with objects representing **bad memories** before setting them on **fire**! One of the “**Good Riddance Day**” organizers said, *“It really is this **need** we have—even when the world is **crazy**—to say, 'You know **what?** I'm gonna let go of the things that have been dragging me **down** and gonna look **forward** with a sense of **hope** and the possibility of **change**...either for myself personally **OR** for the world. So, 2023 is my chance to **detox** in a big way.”*

But “running the race” that St. Paul outlined for us can’t be wished away by some contrived **immolation** or **smashing spree**. It takes a **concerted** kind of forgetting & remembering that only the Holy Spirit can provide in order to maintain the **pace** and attain the **goal** of that “upward calling” St. Paul speaks about in Phil. 3. So, let me ask you: *“Have you found the secret of knowing when and how to **forget** and when and how to **remember**?”*

Sometimes there are **roadblocks**. For example, back in the days when the TV series “**House**” was on, I recall an episode appropriately titled, “**You Must Remember This**”, in which the arrogant but brilliant **doctor** had to deal with a patient diagnosed with “**hyperthymesia...also known as HSAM or Highly Superior Autobiographical Memory**”. This middle-aged character with **hyperthymesia** literally remembered literally **everything** she said and did since the onset of puberty. People like these literally **CAN’T** forget, and they expend an **excessive** amount of time thinking about their **pasts** and displaying an **extraordinary** ability to recall specific **events**, including every little mundane activity, like what she had to **eat** every **day** for every **meal** for the past **decades**! This extraordinary ability can be a **blessing**, but at **many** other times, it is a **curse**! You see, unfortunately, she also remembered all the **wrongs** people had done to her, as well as all the wrongs she committed against **others...and those memories haunted and harassed** her every moment of the day and night, leading to the realization from Dr. House that, *“Each of us also needs to **FORGET** as much as we need to **REMEMBER**.”*

Then again, excessive **forgetfulness** is not a blessing **either**! Heb. 2:10 says, *“So we must listen very carefully to the truth we have heard, or we may drift away from it.”* If we have no **memory**, we are **adrift**, because memory anchors us to the **past**, interprets the **present**, and charts a course for the **future**.

Consider the case of Jimmie G., who had the rare neurological disorder called **Korsakoff Syndrome**. This disorder affects the **memory**. Jimmie walked into Dr. Oliver Sacks’ office in 1975 with a cheery, *“Hiya, Doc! Nice morning! Do I take this chair here?”* Dr. Sacks tested the man’s **memory**. He remembered his childhood **home, friends, school**, and the **Navy**, that he had joined in 1943. He was stationed on a **sub** and could still remember **Morse Code**. He vividly recalled his service in the Navy through the end of the war in **1945...but that's where all the memories stopped**. Completely! Jimmie couldn't remember anything from **1945** to the then **present (1975)—30 years**! He thought that Truman was **president**, the periodic table stopped with **uranium**, and **no one** had been to the moon. Worst of **all**, he had no recollection of anything that happened more than **a few minutes** in the past. He still thought he was **19-years-old**, not his **actual** age of **49 years**. Dr. Sacks showed him a **mirror**, and Jimmie gazed in it at the middle-aged man with bushy gray **hair**. He was shocked! Sacks calmed him by taking him to a window to watch a ballgame in a park **below**, left him **alone** for two minutes, and then **returned**. Jimmie was still at the window

gazing at the kids in the park. He wheeled around" *"Hiya, Doc! Nice morning. You want to talk to me—do I take this chair here?"* Doctor asked him, *"Haven't we met before, Mr. G.?"* *"No,"* responded Jimmie, *"I can't say we have."*

Over the next **nine years** as a patient, Jimmie and Dr. Sacks were constantly introduced and reintroduced. He stayed in the convalescent home where Sacks worked but never learned his way around the hallways. He was good at **rapid** games, like checkers and tic-tac-toe, but got lost at **chess** because the moves were too slow. Sacks said, *"I had never encountered, even **imagined**, such a power of amnesia."* The staff at the home spoke of Jimmie as a "**lost soul**."

Without **memory**, we **ARE** lost souls. You see, in the Bible, memory is much more than **cognitive recall**, such as remembering the dates for a history exam or remembering where you left your **car keys**. In the **Bible**, memory includes **the MIND**, but it **also** includes **emotion** and the **WILL**.

"**Remembering**" is a key Biblical word. Oddly enough, "**forgetting**" is **NOT**. The words "**remind**" and "**memory**" and "**remember**" are used three to four times **more** than the word "**forgetting**." While the Bible depicts forgetting mostly in **dire terms** related to spiritual **apostasy**, it also presents some instances when it's a **blessing**. You see, there **ARE** some things even God Himself says we **should** forget.

Why, then, in our text would St. Paul—who constantly reminds people to look back at the great acts of God in human history—now ask them to **forget** what's behind them? Well, when Paul speaks of "**forgetting what lies behind**," he certainly can't mean you should forget everything in the **PAST**! So then, what **IS** it that you and I **SHOULD** forget—and **why**? Well, let me put it to you in very **personal** terms. As you look back over this past year of **2022**—a **year**, by the way, several people have told me was the worse year they can **remember** for them—what is it that you need to **forget**, so that you then can also begin to also **REMEMBER** and appreciate more deeply the blessings God wants to **give** you? Let me make **two suggestions**.

**FIRST** of all, I suggest that you **forget** all the bad done **TO** you.

Yes, I know. Only a **lobotomy** can accomplish that! But when Scripture says **FORGET**, it also assumes **FORGIVE**...in fact, just as Christ has forgiven **US**! Do you think when God says in Heb. 8:12, *"For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will **remember their sins no more**"* that the Almighty God suffers from actually **amnesia**? Not hardly! No, I'd say it's intended more like the words of the late lady of faith and former concentration camp survivor, Corrie Ten Boom, who once responded with **these words** when asked about an incredibly heinous incident she had endured: *"I distinctly **remember forgetting** about that."* That act of her **will** set her spirit free to live **FOR** Christ and **LIKE** Christ.

St. Paul certainly had **many** people who **hated** him and caused trouble for his **ministry**...even so-called “believers” who betrayed him and hurt him the **most**. He would often go into cities and towns to preach the Gospel, and end up being flogged, stoned, ridiculed, imprisoned...and one time, left for **DEAD!** At times, when he went **away**, a congregation born from his ministry often would seem eager to kneel before the first **false teacher** that came along **behind** him! He had every reason to look back on his **PAST** and feel that he'd somehow suffered at the hands of other people. The great thing about this man, though, is that he wasn't **trapped** by those memories. How did he break **free** from those bad memories? Some of you may have that question this morning: "I've come from this miserable background—from this marriage, from this childhood; this broken relationship. I **want** to forget, but I **can't!** What's the **key** to forgetting the things that have been **done** to me? Well, how did **St. Paul** break free?"

Keep in mind that this same man who wrote these words—"**forgetting the past**" in Philippians—also wrote, "**Love keeps no record of wrongs**" in 1 Corinthians. That's the **key!** As you look back on **your** past, the Holy Spirit has empowered you to turn horrible situations for **good**, simply because your Lord **commands** you to! You truly **can** say: "**Whatever they did to me, I'm still going to love them; I'm not going to keep a record of that wrong; I'm not going to keep going over it; I'm not going to plan revenge.**"

But then, **SECONDLY**, we also need to be free from all the **BAD** that **WE PERSONALLY** have generated or done against **others!**

Some of us are saying: "*Actually, it isn't what was done to **me** that bothers me most; it's all those things **I've** done to **OTHERS** that really nag at me!*" We have an enemy, the **Devil**, who constantly accuses us of these things. That's his **job**, and he does it very **successfully**. He gets us **into** trouble and then accuses us for **being** in trouble. Worse of **all**, he gets us to question the legitimacy of God's grace and **forgiveness** in the life of us redeemed sinners. So, **CLAIM** that forgiveness, the total forgiveness for **WHATEVER** you have done!

And then begin to **REMEMBER** and **RECITE** God's promises throughout this glad New Year...promises like: **Ps. 103:12**, "*As far as the east is from the west, so far does He remove our transgressions from us.*" Remember God's words in **Isa. 49:15-16**? "*Can a mother forget her nursing child? Can she feel no love for the child she has borne? But even if that were possible, I would **not** forget you! See, I have written **your name** on the palms of My hands.*"

As the years go by, we remember that God has remembered **US** in Jesus Christ, and because **He** was raised, so also **WE** shall rise as forgiven and redeemed members of His Forever Family. You **MUST** remember this, because our memories of God's people are **MADE** of this!

My fellow redeemed and forgiven children of God, the **past** is the **past**, and the future of every New Year we have **left** of this earth is still to be **written**, so **FORGET** what needs to be **forgotten** and **REMEMBER** what needs to be **remembered** as you face your remaining future on this earth, because we have no way of knowing our exact future, but we **DO** know Who **HOLDS** it in His divine hands. To be honest, “**the fix is in**” as far as this “**race**” Paul was talking about and which we **ALSO** participate in each day. **ALL** those Who trust in Christ alone for their salvation “**win in the end,**” no matter in **WHAT** year their “**place in the race**” happens to finish.

Meanwhile, it’s **crucial** for us to live out each new **YEAR**—in fact, each new **DAY**—realizing an indescribable and eternal future awaits **each** of us. Like St. Paul, we must **FORGET** what lies **behind** us on the basis of also **REMEMBERING** what God still has in **STORE** for us through His **Son**. And what is the ultimate **prize** for each of those who finish the race? As Paul himself approaches the prize-giving ceremony, he writes in 2 Timothy 4: *"The time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, **I have finished the race**, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me **the crown of righteousness**, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to **me**, but also to **all** who have longed for His appearing."*

So, to make this a **TRULY** “**glad new year**”, please don’t “**forget to remember**” to ask the Holy Spirit to help you to run the race **well**, praying **these words** every step of the way: “**Maranatha! COME Lord Jesus! And REMEMBER me when You come into Your kingdom.**”

**Amen!**