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Philippians 3:12-16

How Do We Love Ourselves? Moving into God’s Future

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Philippians 3:12-16 New Revised Standard Version

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. 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, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us then who are mature be of the same mind; and if you think differently about anything, this too God will reveal to you. Only let us hold fast to what we have attained.

There is a wonderful part in the great film classic The Lion King where Pumba and Timon are talking to Simba. Simba, you remember, is Mufasa’s lion cub. Mufasa was the head of the lion pride and he is killed when his brother, Scar, tricks him. Scar gets him to go save his son, Simba, and he is instead trampled by wildebeests. Simba feels so guilty he leaves the pride in shame. He feels responsible for his dad’s death. He feels like it is his fault his dad died. He wasn’t strong enough, he wasn’t smart enough, he wasn’t good enough, and he was tricked by his uncle, Scar, and he is the reason his dad died. He blames himself and he can’t forgive himself, so he decides that he needs to punish himself.

Simba meets Pumba, a warthog, and Timon, a meerkat. Pumba and Timon can see that Simba is upset. Pumba asks, “Is there anything we do?” Simba says, “Not unless you can change the past?” They are trying to encourage Simba to move forward, to let the past go, and they say some memorable words. “You have to put your behind in your past.” Wait, that doesn’t sound right… “You have to put your past behind you. Bad things happen.”

The past is the past and it is our job to move into God’s future for our lives. The Apostle Paul says it so well in our scripture for today in his letter to the people in Philipi. From Philippians 3:12-16, “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. 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, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us then who are mature be of the same mind; and if you think differently about anything, this too God will reveal to you. Only let us hold fast to what we have attained.”

Paul isn’t saying that he has the Christian life all figured out or that he is perfect, but he is reaching out for Christ who has so wondrously reached out for him. God is beckoning us onward to Jesus. Paul isn’t discouraged by the fact that he keeps messing up, he is motivated to try again towards God’s goal for his life. Paul is saying that he is on his way and he is not turning back. But it is so easy for us to give up, so easy for us to get discouraged.

If I am counseling someone and they are struggling with moving forward, I will suggest some things that they can do to let go of their guilt, to let go of the ways that they feel broken. I will suggest that they go on a walk, (I usually suggest White Rock lake) and pick up some rocks. You might write on the rocks or just say what you need to let go of, and throw that rock into the lake. Or write what you need to let go of on sheets of paper and tear them up or put them in your fireplace. But if that doesn’t seem to help, time heals. And that sounds like an easy out, like a cliché, but time does help bring healing. When you are in the midst of the pain, to hear the words time heals may not be helpful because in the moment it feels like it will never get better.

I remember when my stepdad died when I was 17 and the first anniversary of his death felt as raw and painful as it did when he had died the year before. But, on the 9th anniversary of his death, I forgot. The day passed without me realizing the significance of what had happened on that day 9 years before. And that made me feel horrible because I had forgotten. So, then I prayed. I prayed with a grateful heart because I had learned so much from my stepdad. I prayed prayers of thanksgiving for the way that he loved God and the way that he loved me. I prayed prayers for peace for him and for me. Time does help heal our brokenness but for me, time heals because of prayer.

Jesus has utterly changed me and saved my life. I owe God everything. Christ saved me. I would have made a wreck of my life and done so many stupid things. God gave me meaningful work. God saved me. My stepdad died just before I went to science camp at Trinity University where I met this guy named Lee. Eight years later, we would get married. I have this vivid memory of sitting by a fountain in downtown San Antonio when we were dating and talking about what we wanted out of life. I said that I wanted to make lots of money so that I could travel the world. Lee said that he wanted to be happy. His answer was much better than mine. Following Jesus makes me happy. Serving others as the hands and feet of Jesus makes me happy. What makes you happy?

Tim McGraw has a great song called “Better than I used to be” that includes these wonderful words: “I ain’t as good as I’m gonna get but I’m better than I used to be. I’ve pinned a lot of demons to the ground. I’ve got a few old habits left but there’s still one or two I might need you to help me get. Standing in the rain so long has left me with a little rust but put some faith in me and someday you’ll see. There’s a diamond under all this dust. I ain't no angel. I still got a few more dances with the devil. I’m cleaning up my act little by little I’m getting there. I can finally stand the man in the mirror I see. I ain’t as good as I’m gonna get but I’m better than I used to be.”

We are better than we used to be. Paul says we have to forget what lies behind and strain forward to what lies ahead. We press on because Christ Jesus has made us his own. Christ is with us, amid our struggles at home or at work or in the world. Christ is with us, encouraging us, comforting us, working with us, guiding us, granting us the grace and courage necessary to be the people of God in the world right now.[[1]](#footnote-2)

The amazing thing about a church family is we are bound together. We provide hope for one another, we support each other, forgive each other and encourage each other.[[2]](#footnote-3) Every January we renew our baptismal vows and come touch the waters of baptism to remember our own baptism, to remember that we are beloved sons and daughters of God, to remember that we are a new creation in Christ. January seems like a long time away and I need to be reminded that God is with me. I need to be reminded that the past is the past and that God is with me today and tomorrow and the next day. I invite you to come to the waters of baptism and as you touch them, may you remember that you are God’s beloved child and that God is with you today. Amen.

1. http://www.davidlose.net/2017/06/trinity-sunday-a-the-great-promise/ [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. http://www.davidlose.net/2017/06/trinity-sunday-a-the-great-promise/ [↑](#footnote-ref-3)