

A thousand years in thy sight. A sermon preached on December 31, 2017 at St. Giles Presbyterian Church, Prince George, BC by Rev. Herb Hilder.

Lessons PSALM 90

JUDE 24,25

MATTHEW 18:16-20

On our first and only visit to St. John's,
Newfoundland,
Many years ago,

I was struck by the cosmopolitan atmosphere of
the city.

The richness of its history and culture

This is a world port and that was clear as
one looked at the ships coming in and out of
Conception Bay.

With your back to the cathedral, and
looking out over Conception Bay, as you look out
you will see just to your right, a large red bull's-
eye,

Painted a white backgrounded sign

If you travel around the bay to say Signal
Hill, you will see another such bull's-eye on a
building lower down the hillside you have just
stood on,

And slightly to the left of the bull's-eye at the top
of the hill

These are markers

When they are lined up, they show the heading
of the only entrance between the rocks into St.
John's Harbour

For hundreds of years – markers such as
these have been used to navigate over the granite
shoals that have made St. John's one of the best
naturally protected harbours on the Atlantic
coast.

Markers – we're all seen them.

We constantly benefit from them

Where would be for instance if the pilot of the
plane in which we were flying – said – landing
lights – runway markers – naw I just set her
down in an open space

Or blood pressure readings that help to avoid
more serious health issues

Can you imagine a highway department
saying – everyone knows enough to slow down
around "this" curve?

So we'll put this dangerous curve sign
somewhere else

And what family has never used some sort
of grow chart to mark the growth of children in
compared to the parents?

Well, January 1st is a marker we use every
year

It signifies the beginning of a new year

New starts, new hopes, new plans, fresh beginnings
We won't go down the road of New Year's Resolutions....

The scriptures speak about markers. Texts just seem to stand out – calling our attention to certain truths about God and our relationship to Him

This morning,

I want us to consider just two such texts – markers if you will

Psalm 90 and the last two verses of Jude's letter

Psalm 90 – the subscription says 'a prayer of Moses, the Man of God'

It might be a prayer of Moses that the Psalmist has transcribed – we cannot be certain

What is clear is: this Psalm was written by an individual who has the wisdom and experience of age behind him

He looks at the world and his place in it, very differently than that of a young person who may see himself/herself as indestructible.

The writer of Psalm 90 knows all too well about what a friend once delightfully termed "the temporal nature of this earthly body"

The Psalmist knows about mortality

The concluding verses from Jude are one of the better known worship service benedictions. Growing up in St. Andrew's, Welland, never were there more welcome words to a fidgety kid than when the ministers of my childhood – (Wilf McLeod and Ross Adams) would stand in the middle of the front, raise their arms and speak these words

For it meant the service was OVER!! Little wonder that many of the old timers at St. Andrew's expressed surprise and wonder the night I was ordained to the Ministry of Word and Sacraments. They remembered the fidgety, troublesome kid... But that is another story for another time...

From these two texts – Psalm 90 and Jude 24, 25 what truths, what markers can we see as we are poised at the beginning of a brand new calendar year?

#1 God does not change

That is the promise in the first two verses of Psalm 90

Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations.

Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

Created things have a beginning and an ending

Not so their Creator, says the Psalmist
 HE exists forever
 God is always the same
 He does not grow older
 His life does not wax or wane

As one commentator says about these
 verses, God cannot change for the better – for He
 is already perfect
 And being perfect, he cannot change for the
 worse.

Think about the implications of these
 verses!

As His people, we are told to trust in the Lord
 with nothing less than our lives and our future

Big problem – if as time went on; God
 became weary of us,
 Or tired of dealing with us
 Or became cynical, callous, cranky and difficult
 Mark though those are human characteristics –
 not divine ones

God never becomes less truthful,
 Or less merciful,
 Or less just
 Or less good than he used to be

The character of God is today and always
 will be exactly what it was in Biblical times

*What an incredibly powerful marker then with
 which to anchor this New Year ahead*

The changelessness of God,

*The unalterable truth of His words
The incontestable evidence of His constant love toward
us*

*Not just for the first week of every month, or the
month of June or the year 2018
But for our lifetime and beyond*

**Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all
generations. (vs.1)**

Reflect on that verse – so much can change
around us;

The unwanted can become the norm

The unexpected the way things are.

We find ourselves living in a ‘new reality’

Isn't it both heartening and hopeful that
God and His promises do not change!

What he says will be

What he promises will take place

No human agency or ungodly power will prevent
this

The first marker then – *God does not change.*

A second – *God, in the person of His Son, Jesus
Christ loves us in real and identifiable ways.*

This is a major theme that runs through all the
gospels, all the epistles or letters, including the
one from which two verses were read this
morning

But how hard it is to seize and hold onto that
truth on a daily basis?

Noise, busyness and hurry often confuse us;
 A poor sense of self worth, lingering guilt and
 unhealed memories undermine this truth to the
 point that no matter how many times we have
 heard this marker or clearly seen it in our lives
 And in the lives of others

We too often think the truth is for everyone
 BUT us.

If we are in any doubt about God's love for
 us, then this morning's reading from Jude is but
 one of hundreds of examples found in just the
 New Testament

And these are powerful promises – these two
 verses in Jude

**A promise for now...to him who is able to keep
 you from falling**

**a promise for the future – to him who is able to
 make you stand without blemish in the
 presence of his glory with rejoicing...**

keep us from falling

An image of great power

An image that speaks about God guarding us,
 protecting us,

keeping us

Helping us,

not to stumble

An image that comes to mind -this is in a small
 way, like those times of running alongside my

girls as they were learning how to ride a two
wheel bicycle

I think of walking with them as they took their
first steps

I think of all those stories in scripture that
speak about God's love and reassurance – when
we are weak!

Peter on the beach

Thomas in the upper room

The prodigal returning

The Good Samaritan helping the beaten and
bruised man

And then I think of those times when we do
stumble – you and I

How many times he picks us up – spiritually,
emotionally and sometimes physically

Jude though does not stop with
reflecting on the past and looking at the present
He has us consider carefully the future.

When Christ returns – and that is a promise of
Advent – Christ's coming as a Baby once in
Bethlehem and the certainty of his return as
reigning Lord and head of the Church!

When Christ returns, He will present us without
fault and with great joy

Read: we are not called to worship and
entrust our lives into the hands of some petulant,
narrow minded deity.

When Christ returns, his purpose will not be to make us grovel – great clip board in hand ready to list the times we stumbled.

For the Lord is all too aware of our humanity!

And while I do believe the return of Christ will bring judgment,
I believe judgment will not be the main event so to speak.

Being ushered, with rejoicing in the presence of the glory of God will be.

God, in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ loves us in real and identifiable ways – Marker #2 for a new year nearly here.

A third marker from these lessons – especially the Psalm comes from a personal life lesson learned many years ago.

Shortly into my ministry, a colleague and I were discussing a number of common pastoral issues in the Port Elgin, New Brunswick community.

He was the minister of the local united church, I was the Presbyterian minister.

History and the smallness of the community of Port Elgin made the movement of families and individuals between the United and Presbyterian churches common and long standing.

He and I then branched off to other topics — like me, he had recently lost his father
Like me, my colleague was an only child

He was several years older than I and certainly had more life experience — ministry was a second calling for him.

In the course of the conversation about bereavement, he said,

You know Herb; you don't really begin to appreciate life until you realize that one day you will die.

And I didn't fully understand that until after my Dad's death"

AS it was with him, it became with me
You don't really appreciate life until you realize that one day you will die....

This is why I am convinced Psalm 90 is written by one with a broad life experience.

For life experience is perspective giving and humbling.

When I first heard Psalm 90 — or read it as a responsive Psalm in church — I thought what a party pooper, what an Eeyore-- the Psalmist
All this talk about dust, mortals, swept away, like a dream, fades and withers as images for life here and now!!

Life is to be lived, enjoyed, savoured, reveled in, and experienced whole-heartedly.

Experience has taught me that the Psalmist is not Eeyorish here in Psalm 90 – but very realistic
 Because I do not just read the metaphors for life in Psalm 90 – knowing they are the case!
 But I also read with perspective and appreciation the counsel beginning with verse 12

Teach us to count our days that we may gain a wise heart. (vs.12)

Life is not to be wasted, but savoured, with purpose
 The Psalmist is not referring here in verse 12 or the verses following to layer guilt or with a sense of something “I know something you don’t know!!”

Rather, given all that he has said in this Psalm, a wise heart refers to the capacity to take God into account in the whole of life.

Not only in what we do here or as we are looking at scriptures.

But the whole of life – family, business, retirement, conversation, dealings with shop keepers and merchants, thoughts, plans.

We are not going to live for ever, so seize the day,

Make each day count for the Lord!

Psalmist does not tell us here how this is to take place,

The prayer is only **teach us to count our days that we may gain a wise heart. (vs.12)**

But to prime the teaching pump, let me suggest just a couple of things this teaching would include

I think this teach us to count our days includes such things as *forgiveness* – giving it to and receiving it from others.

Possible only because God has forgiven us first.

There may be a person toward whom you have harboured ill will and resentment because of something that happened weeks, months, even years ago

Perhaps many times you have said, “Some day, I will go to that person, we will make things right and I will forgive or ask for his/her/their forgiveness.

When is the someday to be?

Do you want to carry this lack of forgiveness with you very long into a new year?

By the power of God! Let it go
Spite and an unforgiving heart are not listed among the gifts of the Spirit!

Maybe it is beyond time to trade that spirit of unforgiveness, which can only destroy
For a knowledge of God’s forgiveness of you

Count our days also includes taking time to show love to family and friends

How do you think you family and friends will remember you when you die? For they will remember you and not necessarily for the things you think you will be remembered.

You want to be remembered as a loving, caring person?

Then re-examine your priorities now
And continue to reexamine those priorities.

Teach us to count our days-get to know the Lord better – intentional and regular reading of scripture, prayer,
Meditation

The scriptures in our own language remain one of the most underestimated gifts of the Reformation of the 16th century,
And praise God, not just for the theologically trained.

We have everything to gain and nothing to lose in opening ourselves more to the Lord

For as this morning's scriptural markers for clearly show

- God does not change
- In Jesus Christ, God's love is personal and very real

May we each be given by God into this new year new eyes to see, unblocked ears to hear, strong hearts to fully grasp and determined wills to

follow through on making these markers real
and vibrant in our everyday lives.