

Let's Go!
Philippians 4:1-23

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With the passing of each day, each of us is becoming one day older. As the hours span into days, the days into weeks, and the weeks into years, I am reminded of the words shared with me when Annalise was an infant: "The days were long but the years were short." These words seem extremely accurate. 2018 has whirled by, each day coming and passing very quickly. It seems just yesterday that I was preparing a sermon for the last Sunday of 2017.

What seems like just yesterday, my tiny baby was being baptized as an 8 week old at Wabash. Annalise is now a big girl of six, learning to read, playing with Barbie dolls and do all the things normal six year olds do.

I hope 2018 has been a good year for you. There have been many momentous occasions for me. One of the high points of my life, being ordained, took place less than 8 weeks ago, on Veterans Day weekend. And last weekend, I ventured to the happiest place on earth, Disneyland, and managed to walk nearly 16 miles in two days. My daughter continues to swim like a fish, play the piano and she loves to write our names in the folders passed through the pews. She started kindergarten along with voice lessons and harp lessons. But 2018 has also come with some low points as well: my beloved farm dog, Bella died two weeks ago, my garages were burglarized not once, but twice. I also have a new problem in that the creek that runs through my property has been dammed by a busy beaver leading to my pastures being flooded.

While the good times likely outweigh the difficult days, I can say that as 2018 draws to a close, I am at peace and comforted knowing that God has been with me on the journey. And that's what Philippians 4 is all about: finding peace and joy in all circumstances. There is the familiar hymn, 'It is Well with My Soul'. The author, Horatio Spafford penned this beautiful hymn after significant loss in his life. The first loss was the sudden death of his son at age two and the Great Chicago Fire of 1871 that ruined him financially. Spafford had been an attorney by trade and his life's work literally went up in smoke with the fire. He had planned on traveling to Europe but after the fire was delayed. He sent his wife and daughters on ahead. Tragically, during the transatlantic sailing, the ship his family was on - the Ville Du Havre collided with another ship. In the sinking of the ship, Spafford's four daughters drowned. His wife sent him this now infamous telegram, "Saved alone."

The famous lines of his hymn, 'It is Well with my Soul', have comforted many grieving people over the nearly 150 years since it was written. Think about the context of those familiar words and the anguish Spafford must have been experiencing, having lost precious lives and most of his worldly wealth.

When peace like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to know
It is well, it is well, with my soul.

Philippians 4 is precisely about this source of everlasting peace and steadfastness that we have in Christ. This passage focuses on the hope we have; Through Christ alone we know that this world is not the end. And whatever tragedy may befall us, we can say confidently that we have citizenship in an eternal kingdom and that the sorrows and tears of this lifetime will all pass away. With Jesus Christ we have a future, eternal life and we can remain on a path that will lead to heaven. The apostle Paul wrote this letter to the Christians at Philippi from his Roman cell. He wrote confidently and with a palpable joy because he truly understood that the Lord was near and that Christ's return was going to be soon. With Jesus Christ's return, things would be put right. This is the source of our joy and we can turn to God with whatever troubles us. When the troubles of this world seem insurmountable, we are encouraged by Paul to turn whatever is bothering us over to the Lord, no matter how trivial or how insurmountable they may seem. It is through this sharing of our burdens, God is able to meet us in our despair and to provide the peace that balms our weary hearts and minds. Paul encourages to focus on the good things of life in Christ and to train our minds to what is true, honorable, just, pure, pleasing, commendable, excellent and worthy of praise. By focusing on goodness and hope, we are able to be the antidote for the brutality that pervades this life.

Just a few days ago, I was talking with one of my clients that works as a police dispatcher here in Enumclaw. He was remarking about the rash of suicidal people that this area and town has been experiencing. He mentioned that in the week around Thanksgiving, there had been three suicides. When I asked what he thought was driving this trend, this man mentioned that there was more and more older adults that were living with depression and disappointment. Philippians 4 addresses specifically the antidote to despair: hope! The hope we have from living fully into the promise of being in relationship with a living Savior, Jesus Christ. Through Jesus Christ we not only are we able to overcome depression, despair and hopelessness, but we are able to tap into resurrection power.

In Philippians 4, we learn that Paul sees another reality that holds the future. That reality is God's redeeming work in the world, that which is already happening and yet drawing near. When we train our minds to focus on this, knowing that God is in control, we are able to train ourselves to focus on God's power and control, not on the fragile state of the world when we rely on our own devices. Everyone in this room has probably experienced anxiety. It's a natural state of affairs if we allow the problems of this life to creep in, gnawing away at our peace and our stomach linings. But the answer is as actually quite simple: To experience God's peace instead of anxiety, we are instructed to pray with thankfulness about every concern. And when we are able to turn our problems over to God, then we are able to stop trying to solve our issues on our own.

I cannot protect Annalise from the sorrows that come from living in our world. I cannot wrap her in bubble wrap and be there to catch her when she stumbles or when she falls. I won't always be there; but if I am successful as a parent, I will equip her with the tools to recognize that God is loving, generous and kind and that he cares about every detail of her life.

When I was a child, I grew up in the Lopez Community church. One of the pastors that shaped my beliefs was Pastor Rice, a man that loved the Lord and that effused confidence that this world was not the end. I remember him teaching me and the other Sunday School children a song about the source of true happiness. The author Ira F. Stanphill was a pastor in Fort Worth, Texas. While driving home from church one afternoon in 1974, he became convinced that while the commercials might sell booze and cigarettes, they really did not ring true. On the car radio, Mr. Stanphill listened to a steady stream of commercials that assured the listeners cigarettes and alcoholic beverages were surefire ways to have a good time. Mr. Stanphill knew what the source of true happiness and contentment was--and it was not something that could be found by puffing a cigarette or drinking booze.

These two writers, Ira Stanphill and Horatio Spafford, put to music an essential truth. That our lot in life does not dictate how we respond to it; God is loving and in control and we can rest in the assurance that he has it covered.

Living with this hope will help us tomorrow and each day that we have awaiting us. I hope and pray 2019 is a good year for each one of you. And while I cannot tell you what the future holds, I can tell you about the loving Savior that holds that future. Yes, we experienced some tremendous losses in 2018. We said a final

good bye in this lifetime to Senator John McClain, President George H.W. Bush and his wife Barbara. We also lost the great evangelist, Billy Graham.

The title of today's sermon is "Let's Go!" and where I got this came from Eugene Peterson, the scholar and Presbyterian pastor who died recently at the age of 85. Eugene Peterson translated the bible into contemporary language, called the Message Bible. Eugene Peterson was recently called home after a bout of heart disease and dementia, and one short week in hospice care. Eugene Peterson was a native of the Pacific Northwest. He was born in Stanwood and grew up in Kalispell, MT. Peterson attended Seattle Pacific University, New York Theological Seminary and John Hopkins University. He was raised in the Pentecostal church and ordained in the PCUSA, pastoring a church in Maryland for nearly 30 years and teaching at Regent College. His son, Eric Peterson, pastors a Presbyterian church in Colbert, just outside Spokane.

In one of Peterson's final works, *As Kingfishers Catch Fire* he wrote, "The story of our faith, our very existence, begins and ends with joy," he wrote. "Joy at the beginning, joy at the end, joy everywhere in between. Joy is God's creation and gift. No authentic biblical faith is conceivable that is not permeated with it."

In his obituary, published in *Christianity Today*, his family described the last hours of Eugene Peterson's life. His family relayed how his last hours seemed to be in the company of angels and the reported that his last words were of an impatience that he seemed to have for what lay ahead in the next lifetime. "During the previous days, it was apparent that he was navigating the thin and sacred space between earth and heaven," they stated. "We overheard him speaking to people we can only presume were welcoming him into paradise. There may have even been a time or two when he accessed his Pentecostal roots and spoke in tongues as well. Among his final words were, 'Let's go.'"

So that is what I hope you take from today's message: God wants each of us to exit this life joyfully but in this life he also wants us to have an abundance of peace and joy. Just like me being unable to promise only sunshine and rainbows for Annalise, God cannot promise us only a level, even path.

There are bound to be bumps, and ruts, and valleys. But we know the one that navigates those bumps with us. We have a loving, suffering Savior that cares about each of our worries. Every single one of our problems. And who is willing to take on every last one of our cares. So, let's get busy on that journey. Let's Go!