

My Final Sermon Here

#14 16-17

Psalm 119:33-40

Leviticus 19:1-2, 9-18

1 Corinthians 3:10-11, 16-23

Matthew 5:38-48

38“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ **39**But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; **40**and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; **41**and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. **42**Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you. **43**“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ **44**But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, **45**so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. **46**For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? **47**And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? **48**Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

So, I was struggling with what to title this sermon. Often times I take a phrase or a topic out of one or more of the scriptures and try to be clever, or succinct, or direct . . . Sermons must have Titles. And when you are in the calling to do many sermons, you don't want to be too predictable, nor do you want to bore others, or yourself, for that matter. I kept thinking, “What should I call my final sermon?” And Nothing else popped up - so here you are . . . “My Final Sermon Here” - kinda obvious.

I've done a little research, and have come up with me having written and preached just shy of 350 sermons during my time here. For someone who had only preached periodically up until being called here, that feels like an accomplishment. It really didn't take me long to love writing sermons. Although I started out terrified. Sitting in my lovely little office, often with a candle lit, sometimes with incense, praying to remove my ego from the process and hear the Spirit of God, working with the scholarly efforts I have been practicing and trusting on my ability to pay attention to God through my heart and mind and soul, for as long as I can remember.

It has been a wonder filled blessing to be your preacher these 2,821 days, or 7 years, 8 months, and 19 days, or 403 weeks, or roughly 67,704 hours, or 4,062,240 minutes, or 243,734,400 seconds; averaging up to 772.88% of a common year. You might be able to tell by now, with my counting of the sermons, and these statistics, that I'm struggling with *this* sermon. Let no one be under any illusion that this final Sermon here at Hyattstown is easy for me. Looking back over the years I see the presence of God's grace all these years, through everyone here.

I feel that, looking back, I can see where every one of us was doing our very best to do what Jesus asked of us in the Gospel I read earlier: forgiving and sacrificing and loving and trusting God, sometimes it was painful, but we all kept persisting. We have all been called to grow in faith, and some found their growth better accomplished elsewhere, and others and new folks, have come together and worked hard to be where this church is now ~ on the precipice of a New Beginning.

Maybe that should have been the title - "On the Precipice of a New Beginning" because that is where we all are, not just me. You have been working with the New Beginning program from Hope Partnership, you've laid the groundwork. It is like preparing for a race, and since I'm going to Kentucky, I'll use the example of the Kentucky Derby. You will be like the next winner of the 2017 Derby! Like Nyquist, the winner of the 2016 derby. He didn't just go to the gate and run the race and win, he was bred and trained and ran in all kinds of races, and his owner, trainer and jockey were also well versed in what to do to help him!

This is a Congregationalist church, so it is a group effort, but for the sake of this analogy, I'm going to say you are bred from generations of good and wise and faithful servants who worshiped in and served this church over more than 175 years! Debbie Blair, your wonderful Board Chair, is the jockey and she is going to need everyone's support and encouragement.

The Regional Minister, Rev. Allen Harris, as well as Hope Partnership, your Interim, and your next Pastor will be the trainers. I encourage as many of you as possible to attend things like the regional Assembly and the General Assembly, for through those everyone is all the more empowered and horizons are expanded! We discover solutions, which we could not have imagined, to challenges our solo church is facing, through the wider church experiences!

And never forget that God is your owner! You are not alone! And God has so many amazing resources that none of us could possibly predict, so I suggest you just keep moving forward, but keep looking for those inevitable signs from God!

Mostly don't you ever forget, that you are this talented, beautiful, experienced ~ and called ~ thoroughbred! Waiting to run and shine and hear the roar of the crowds rooting you on and cheering when you get to the winners circle with your garland of red roses! Never forget, we are all called to grow in faith as long as we have this gift of life, and with each step, we will find it was easier to move forward than we imagined. Don't forget the words of the one we worship, and the one we will strive all our lives to live more like: Matthew 11:28-30 25 "... Jesus said, ... 'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.'

Whatever is good and kind, whatever is full of hope, these things are God's! So we practice and live God's love now, and wherever and whenever we can . . . and we will be good and faithful servants, and we will know these words of God are meant for us, Matthew 25:21 (ESV) 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.'

May the future that we all look towards be in anticipation of the joy that is promised to us. So - my final sermon here is marking that we are all on the precipice of a New Beginning, we are called to be good and faithful servants, not in fear but knowing that God's love is easy and light, and we can anticipate joy in the process! This is the promises of our Lord, and it is so good! Let us go forth into those promises! AMEN