

Being the Church in Christ: Wisdom from Pastor Paul

(The Brentwood Sermon Series for 2015)

Memorize & Ponder Text – Philippians 3:13-14

(Full Reading – Philippians 3:12-21)

Week of Sept 27 – Oct 4, 2015

Called and Equipped to Flourish

Philippians 3:13-14 (NRSV)

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.
(Philippians 3:13-14)

*Throughout 2015, the Christian community at Brentwood Presbyterian Church will be considering how to be the church in Jesus Christ, guided by the wisdom of Pastor Paul. We invite you to **listen** for what the Spirit is saying in the text, then **question** how those insights might change the ways you see things and act in the world. Share your thoughts during the week on the meaning the Spirit creates for you in this text by posting a comment on our website – www.brentwoodpc.ca.*

A Provocative Pondering

Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. And let us provoke one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together ... (Hebrews 10:23-25a)

I spent last week in Norland, ON, at Woodstone House, where my dear friends and surrogate parents, John and Bona Duncan, lived out the final years of their lives. Bona died a year ago, and John last spring. John made me his literary executor, responsible for sorting through and disposing of his papers and books. Six boxes of his papers went to the Archives of The Presbyterian Church in Canada and 10 boxes of his books went to the John Howard Society for prison libraries.

You see, John was passionate about prison chaplaincy. He was a major player in the churches' successful campaign to abolish the death penalty in Canada in 1976. He was appalled at how prison management in the last 30 years had become more punitive and retributive, eliminating resources that had once gone into healing and restoration. God, in John's faith, did not give up on people. There was always a chance of the Spirit working to transform even the worst criminal. John had seen it. John had been part of it.

John got, in the core of his being, what Paul is talking about in this passage – forget the past, or at least forgive it, and get on with co-creating the future with Jesus Christ. Christ has enfolded you in his love and that frees up the future for flourishing. There will be trouble, there will be illness, there will be resistance, but in the midst of it all, nothing can separate from the love of God in Christ Jesus and nothing can resist the ultimate triumph of his love. That is the power that nourishes us and sustains us in respecting and supporting the dignity and worth of everyone, no matter what they have done in the past. The 'heavenly call' is to be a blessing to all that we meet. Jesus knew that. Paul knew that. John knew that. And so do we. Now, we just have to go out and practice it, knowing God is with us and encouraging us every step of the way.