

Good Bye 2014! (Sung to the tune Goodbye Norma Jean)

(Goodbye 2014, though I barely new you at all I have to testify, I'm not sad to see you go. You left your share of scars, you made us laugh you made us cry, but you're over now, and we smile and say goodbye. It seems to me, you touched our lives like a candle in the wind...)

We've come to the final Sunday of the year. Hallelujah! We're here and we've survived everything this year had to throw at us, good or bad. We're still here, in spite of it all, because of God's good grace and mercy. God has been faithful and brought us through 2014. As we look back at the year, I hope we can say as Job said, **"The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised."** **Job 1:21**

I looked back and if you were here Sundays and Wednesdays, you heard me preach 104 sermons, counting this one. No wonder you're confused! 104 sermons. That's 625 pages of sermon notes. In addition to that I preached or spoke at 21 funerals and sang at a few more. We dedicated 8 babies and married a few couples as well. We sent people on missions trips, gave generously to missions, had wonderful youth camps and kids kamps. We had hundreds of guests at our Fall Fun Festival and our 2nd annual Day of Hope. We did our best as a church to touch the people of our community. Once again we gave Christmas gifts to the students in the elementary schools in our area as well as helping families both in and outside of our church. Whether you knew it or not, by your faithful giving, you've blessed so many lives in the past year and for that we can give thanks and praise to God. We've seen people committing their life to Christ, we've seen people baptized, others renewing their faith and their commitment to Christ. We've seen people baptized in the Holy Spirit and growing in their walk with Christ. We've seen people taking the first steps to a new life, attending the services, attending the New Community service on Wednesday, building relationships and learning to trust both Jesus and his church. Good things have happened this year.

We said 2014 was to be a year of laughter. We may have laughed, but we've had our share of tears along the way. We said goodbye to some dear folks and members of our church family in 2014. That included, **Len Ballard, June Cypret, Jo Dyer, John Sims, Dean Ledbetter, Juanita Emry, Delores Wyers, Leila Wyers, Teresa Kersey, H. A. Brummett, John Gallup, James Phifer, Greg Calloway, Harold Crow, Jane James, Bernice Hendrix, Wanda Tiller, Faye Osterhout, Pauline Wilburn.** Those are just the ones I preached. I know there are many of you who lost family members and close friends this past year. I don't know

how many funerals I've been to in the past twelve months. I attended a funeral yesterday in fact. Through all the loss I'm thankful we don't sorrow as those who are without hope. We have a hope in Jesus Christ, the one who is the resurrection and the life. Jesus said if we believe in him, even if we die, we will live. The Resurrected One gives us hope that we will see our loved ones again through faith in Christ as Savior and Lord. May the Lord comfort every grieving heart.

The apostle Paul wrote to the Philippian church, **"...being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."**

Philippians 1:6 God has been at work in all of the ups and downs of life, in all of the losses as well as the gains. We have seen the faithfulness of God at work in us and our circumstances and he will carry it on to completion. Thanks be unto God for every moment of his mercy and grace that has blessed our lives in 2014. Let's take a moment and give thanks to God for his blessings we've experienced this past year. Even if it's been the worst year, you are still here, you managed to get dressed and get to church today and that means God has been with you and kept you going up to this moment. Let's thank him for that.

If you've been around this church for awhile, you know I like to take the last Sunday of the year to look back and to share some thoughts to help us move into the new year. Next Sunday we will talk about how to get through 2015, but this morning it's my annual goodbye to the year sermon. I've been saying these things for years, but every year I feel the need to say it again and to try a little harder to live out these things. So here we go: time to say goodbye to 2014.

I'm not much of a movie goer and I think the last animated movie I saw may have been the original Toy Story or Beauty and the Beast. Consequently, I have no idea what the movie Frozen is all about. I don't know who the characters are, but I do know that everyone was singing the hit song from the movie called, "Let It Go." (Play Song) That just happens to be the first point of the sermon today.

What do we do with 2014? Let It Go! Some of you are saying "good riddance" and others are saying "I hate to see it go. It's been a great year." Regardless of what you think about this past year, come Thursday morning, 2014 will be in the books. His-to-ry. A brand new year will be before you but you know what? Many of us next week will be standing on the threshold of 2015 contemplating the dimensions of the doorway that leads us into that new year. We will be trying once again to decide whether we can package up all of our regret and grudges and

wounds, and hard feelings and bitterness, and guilt and shame from the past and drag it through the door and into next year. We've spent most of our life dragging our baggage from the past around with us and we can't imagine parting with it just yet. We'll just take it with us into 2015. Besides, even if we try to let it go someone will remind us and point it out. "Hey, that's your bitterness. You aren't going to leave that behind, are you? How can you forget how they treated you? How can you act like what happened never happened?" In spite of the fact I say something like this every year, we still have a hard time turning loose and letting go of the past, letting go of the wounds, the hurts, the bitterness, the regret.

I say this and we all think about people we know and nod our head and say, "Yeah, I know people just like. They hold grudges and refuse to forgive others and can't move on with their life." Hello, blind spot! Take a look at yourself. Are you holding onto something from the distant past, or from the recent past, something from 2014 that is toxic? Something that is poisoning your life? Let it go! You can't be all God wants you to be, you can't receive all God wants you to receive, you can't do all he wants you to do if you are busy nursing old wounds, carrying around a grudge, trying to punish someone for something they did to you years ago. There is something God wants to impart to you in this coming year, something he wants to teach you, something he wants to release to you this year, but you can't receive it, you won't receive it, unless you let go of the past and embrace God's present and his plans for the future. You can't embrace what God has for you if your arms are extended keeping people away. How about living with open arms for a change? **Don't remain pre-occupied with a past you cannot change. Let it go and embrace what God has for you!**

The apostle Paul said, **"One thing I do, forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."** **Philippians 3:13-14.** Let it go.

"Forgetting what is behind," Paul said. Stop placing all your attention on what is behind you and in the past. Paul no doubt had to work to stop focusing on his own past, the regret and guilt for having persecuted the church. But he chose to leave the past in the past, to let it go.

Forget what is behind. It's time to let it go and forgive. Forgive and the Father in heaven will forgive you. Forgive and a root of bitterness won't poison you and everyone around you.

Let me warn you about something. The writer of Hebrews said, **"Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy...See to it that no one misses the grace of God and**

that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.” Hebrews 12:14-15

See that warning? A bitter root, i.e. bitterness, causes trouble and defiles many. You cannot escape the harm and damage done to others if you allow yourself to grow bitter. I don't care what the reason for it is. I don't care how justified you think you are in feeling the way you do, the final result will be that you defile and cause trouble for people that are within your influence. Those sweet little children in your house that you want to protect from all the bad stuff, you are going to poison them if you allow bitterness to infiltrate your heart and mind. Hear what I'm telling you: Protect them from your bitterness. Let it go. Forgive. Turn it loose.

Receive God's mercy and then choose to show mercy. It's inevitable that you are going to be hurt or betrayed or wounded by someone, sometime. That's inevitable, but becoming bitter over the wound is not. That's a choice you make. That's on you, not on them. The bible tells us to see to it, in other words pay attention and make sure you don't miss the grace of God – you and everyone around you. Make every effort to live in peace and after you've made every effort, try one more time, and then maybe once more, and then just make sure to release it all into the hands of God and refuse to become bitter. Let it go!

As we say goodbye to 2014, acknowledge His sovereignty. What do I mean by that? A sovereign is one who exercises supreme power and authority over all. There is one who has the highest authority and that's God. He is our sovereign. Acknowledging his sovereignty then means we recognize and submit to his will, his authority, his ultimate plan for our lives.

There were things that happened in 2014 that I couldn't understand. It didn't make much sense to me why God would allow that to happen. (“I know, right? Why would that happen?”) I don't know. What I've discovered is that God is sovereign and he is in control – in his timing, in his plans and purposes. He has the ultimate and supreme power and authority over my life. I've asked him to be my sovereign Lord because I know he is God and he is love and he is just and he is righteous and he is truth and he is all wise and he is faithful, and he alone is worthy of my absolute trust. I can trust his actions, his guidance, his sovereignty in my life. You can too.

What he decides is good for me is absolutely good for me. He is the trustworthy God whose purpose and will for our lives is bigger and better than anything we can purpose or will for ourselves. God's pattern for our life is wiser than any pattern we can set for ourselves. So trust the path he is leading you in. As you look back over 2014, can you see it? Can you see places where God worked unexpectedly in your behalf? Can you see where he caused all things,

including the difficult stuff, to work together for your ultimate good? Can you see where something you thought was devastating turned out to be the best thing ever? Yes? Then acknowledge his sovereignty in your life and rest in it. God acts in faithful, redeeming ways.

If you can't see it, rest in his sovereign purposes and surrender the timing of it all to the Lord. He is still at work in your life. He is sovereign and he is good. Trust him and the stuff you can't understand, the mystery that presents itself to your faith, the questions that confront your faith, submit it all to Jesus. We aren't promised answers to all our questions but we are promised his abiding presence will be with us. I can tell you that regardless of how it may have appeared to you, you were never separated from the love of God in 2014, not for a moment!

Some things are reserved for God alone and we just have to trust him and acknowledge his sovereignty. Remember, **“The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law.” Deuteronomy 29:29**

Acknowledge his sovereignty, even in the mystery. Especially in the mystery, especially amidst the doubts and questions that arise. God is at work. God is working. God is. Trust him. Don't try to figure God out. He isn't a mystery to be solved or a puzzle to be worked, he is the God who makes himself known to us in Jesus Christ our Savior. He is God with us. Come to him and know him as Savior and Lord of your life.

As we say goodbye to 2014, give thanks to God for his faithfulness. Can you see how God worked in faithfulness in your life? If you can't, try taking another look. Look hard. Look again. Regardless of what happened in the past twelve months, God is still God, he still reigns, he is still with you, and lo and behold, you are still here. What do you know? There were days you weren't certain you would make it, but here you are! You weren't strong enough or clever enough to pull this off on your own. It was the faithfulness of God.

God kept you by his grace. He forgave you your sins and He is at work helping you learn from the mistakes you made. He is still directing your steps, still leading you away from sin and temptation, still enabling you by his grace to walk as an overcomer in this life. God has been faithful. In spite of it all, God made the sun come up this morning and then showed his mercy to you and enabled you to get dressed and come to worship. He's not finished yet. He'll help you endure to the end of this message and through the last few days of 2014. How do I know? Because He has been, is and always will be faithful!

As we say goodbye to 2014, take a moment to look back. Is there anything you are about to drag into 2015 that needs to stay here, in 2014? Isn't it time you let it go? Let go of the bitterness. Let go of the grudge you've been carrying, the resentment you've been harboring. Let it go. Give it to God this morning. We used to say "let go and let God." Why not? Just empty your hands this morning, let go and let God.

"Lord, I turn loose of everything I don't need and won't need in 2015. I give my past to you. I give the wounds and hurts to you. Forgive me for sins I've committed, wrong actions I've taken, wrong attitudes I've held on to. Forgive me for holding on to old hurts. Grant me the grace to forgive. Forgive me as I forgive others. I place my life in your hands. I'm going to let go and let you have your way in my life. Thank you for forgiving me. I'm starting the new year with a clean slate, walking in your mercy and grace."

Those things you don't understand from 2014, the mystery, the questions, submit them all to God, let go and rest them in his ultimate sovereignty in your life. Trust his timing. He is still at work. Remember, he has begun a good work in you and he will see it through to completion in your life. Trust him and rest in his sovereignty and his grace.

All the rest of it, the stuff that doesn't seem to fit, the stuff you don't know what to do with, just know that God is faithful. Let's give thanks to God for his faithfulness to us throughout 2014.