



The Westminster Pulpit

Sermons Preached at Westminster Presbyterian Church
3900 West End Avenue Nashville, Tennessee 37205-1899

“Moving On” **Sermon on Philippians 3:4b-14**

Donovan A. Drake

October 4, 2026
Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost

It is World Communion Sunday. People all over the world are gathering around a table to taste and see that the Lord is good. It is the oldest practice we have. For thousands of years we have gathered to remember: “This is my body broken for you. This is my blood shed for you.”

Our scripture today was written before any of the gospels. It was written maybe some 25 years after that upper room. The suffering and sacrifice of Jesus have now become the suffering and sacrifice of the church. It is what Paul means when he says, “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus...”. Paul is in prison and has gotten a taste of suffering. He sees it as a good thing.

Philippians 3:4b-14

If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ.

More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith.

I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to lay hold of that for which Christ has laid hold of me.

Brothers and sisters, I do not consider that I have laid hold of it, but one thing I have laid hold of: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal, toward the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

Life moves on. You'll get a reminder of that just by going out these side doors. The memories on the wall. Steve, Jim, Annie, Lew, Norris, Catherine, Imogene, Bill, Jodie, John and Betty Jane. Life moves on.

Back in Durham, I remember the morning drive taking Michael, my son, to high school. It was a short drive, a left turn, a right turn, a right turn. But before the left turn, there was an option to cut the corner and take a short gravel road behind what was an old country church that the city had surrounded, but it was still country. It hadn't moved on.

I would cut that corner and drive behind the church on my left and the graveyard on the right, especially on a high-stress morning, when the tests were looming. I would slow the car down to a crawl and say to Michael, "Do you see all those names on the headstones? Michael, none of those people are worried about taking a test." "Thanks, Dad."

It wasn't so much for him as it was for me. For a child's anxiety is carried by the parent, and I needed some reminder about what's of value in life and what is worth letting go. We have a short time on this earth... Life moves on.

We just heard Paul say he's moved on from things he thought were important. Things he held as near and dear. He calls them now the "things of the flesh": "Circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

Blameless! He was so right! So right! So right! And now he's moved on, calling his resume rubbish; the Iowa translation of the Greek word is "manure," and the New Jersey translation of the Greek is... ..well, I can't say it in church.

He says HE WAS WRONG! When have you heard anyone be so candid about being wrong?

You don't hear that in politics, at the scene of the crime, at work, or at home. "I'm sorry. I was wrong."

Such a rare thing. A couple of years ago, I saw the Grand Tetons for the first time. I got out of the car and stood before such breathtaking glory, and knew I was missing something. I knew I so wanted Beth by my side.

So, a few weeks ago she was. We got a room with a view. What a view. Rock and setting sun, river and bison... "I lift my eyes unto the hills from whence cometh my help." Help, I can't find the words for this awesomeness. It is a gift like no other. Million, billion years old and who am I, but a blink of an eye, O Lord, that you are mindful of me? What a gift to have her there. Moving on.

A ranch house on the side of the road on the way to Jackson Hole, bubbled up a memory of the National Park documentary and the cattle rancher who fought against the National Park with all his might! It was all shot in black and white, but now that same man, in living color but old, said to the camera about his long-ago fight: "I want you all to know that I'm glad I lost, because I was wrong."

I remember that documentary as being amazing, but the only thing I can really remember- his words... "I was wrong." Rare!

Do you ever look back on your most righteous choices? You know, the things you sacrificed friends and family for. The things that made some others wince in pain. Do you ever look back and say, "What I was so right about, well, it's rubbish. "I was wrong."

When I'm wrong - which is so seldom, in fact, I'm hard-pressed to even think of an instance, because those times when I was wrong - I chose to bury the moment in some out-of-the-way place, deep as a bone, behind the shrub, where the grass grows tall. No use dwelling in the past! I don't want to think about it. The wrong is there. I know it. Let's not dwell on it. Can we move on!"

Paul says, "Forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead...." You can't forget. You know where the bones are buried! The past haunts you. Paul has to remember how he stood holding the coats at Stephen's execution.

In all righteousness, they killed him. In all zeal and righteousness. They found a loophole in the law: Thou shalt not kill. They found a loophole in the law: Love your neighbor as yourself. Paul surely can't forget about all that lies behind - the GOOD of his life, the BAD of his life, the UGLY...

When the resurrected Jesus returned to his disciples, how did they recognize him? Did they recognize him through his wounds? Jesus carries the past into the present, into the future, forever, ever and ever. Amen.

"Forgetting what lies behind..." "You don't mean that, Paul. Paul, you are your past. You are the genes of your parents who named you "Saul." Saul means "Prayed for." In Hebrew. Imagine hearing "Prayed for" every time someone called your name. "What's your name?" "Prayed For." "Prayed for... Is 'Prayed For' here?" "Is there a "Prayed For' in attendance?" "I'm here... 'Prayed for' is here."

I suppose "Saul" could be our name, if you think about it.

As the young couple says when joining the church, "We grew up in the church, but in college we drifted away. But when we had our first kid... something about that kid... made us want to come back to church. As if everyone needed to be prayed for."

Anyone in the Church could go by the name Saul. Because you're prayed for here. People who know that, however you got here around this table... your story... is bathed in the story of grace. We look at each other around the table, all the good, the bad, and the ugly...

Prayed for...prayed for...bathed in grace...body and blood.

Moving on.

His name became Paul. Paul is a Latin word. A Roman word that means “small” or “humble.” Leaving all that zeal and right...right...right...right behind...

“Forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead.” You can’t forget... you can’t forget... even when you’re in prison, at the end of your career, and your suffering...causes you to remember... you remember... a table. And the faces in your life around the table.

Steve, Jim, Annie, Lew, Norris, Catherine, Imogene, Bill, Jodie, John and Betty Jane, Saul and Paul. How something was missing without you there.

You remember how they welcomed you to a table. You, with all your wounds and the memories of those who wounded you, came to a table. “There now.” We all have the scars. You remember how they welcomed you... And you remember their love, and grace, and an amazing gift of God. Eternal... the light and we held hands...

You’re an amazing gift of God, a gift like no other. We press onward, sacrificing in love. It is the prize and we can taste it. We can see it. The heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

©2026 Donovan A. Drake
All Rights Reserved.