

**“Turning the Calendar with the God Who Makes All Things New”**

Mary Henderson Bowman

**Date:** December 31, 2023



When I was young, the only calendars available were the paper kind. So, needless to say - it was a big deal when one year came to a close and another began. Some calendars let you peel off one sheet for every day so you could literally watch the year count down to December 31st. Some paper calendars were more like books or diaries that you filled up for a whole year.

But then, suddenly, there came a time when calendars weren't just calendars any more. Calendars had a new look and a new name. Calendars transformed into something called "organizers."

And these "organizers" brought a whole new understanding of time. The "organizer" made crystal clear to everyone — that time was something to be managed, and life was a schedule to be kept. The "organizer" proclaimed the "new understanding" that time was a commodity to be harnessed and tamed like a wild horse. The "organizer" told us that time was ours to control and to bend to our will. And once we did that, life would be easy since we were the ones in charge. Needless to say, the "organizer" had a tremendous appeal to the Self since it put the Self front and center and gave us the illusion that all could indeed be controlled if we were just organized enough. God was given a back seat.

I confess that I fell into the trap of this new thinking. I liked the idea that I could control my life if I just got organized enough — although I never really could get organized enough to control everything.

It wasn't until I got to seminary that I really began to question this "new understanding" about time and to wonder where the "old understanding" had gone.

What was the "old understanding" you might ask? The "original understanding" knew that time was made to be enjoyed not managed. The "old perspective" understood that God — rather than ourselves — stood at the center of our time. Time was understood as a gift from God.

In this morning's service, we are leaning into the "old understanding" of time. Today we are putting aside our organizers, our resolutions, and even ourselves in order to put God front and center as we reflect on our lives as one year comes to a close and another begins.

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One of the gifts of the church is that it can remind us to get out of our own way and allow God to have God’s way with us.

This morning, we are taking time during our Prayers of the People to deliberately review the past year in God’s presence, to remember the gifts we have received and draw even closer to the One who gave the gifts.

We are going to walk into this new year by first walking backwards. We want to face backward to the old year and remember and notice the ways that God has been faithful, has been generous, and has been present in the past year.

Once we are fortified in the God gifts of the past year, we will turn to the new year and offer our lives anew to the One who makes all things new.

In our Scripture reading this morning, we heard God make this claim: “Behold, I make all things new.”

This might be one of the biggest understatements in the Bible.

From the very beginning, God has been making new things — and then when they falter, God makes those things new again and again and again.

We have a God who is a God of new beginnings.

We have a God who is a God of second chances.

We have a God who is in the restoration business.

God is in the business of transformation.

God is making all things new.

As we walk into the new year, let us be watching for what God is making new.

Let us watch for new possibilities when things grow difficult.

Let us lean into a God who is actively working and invites us to work alongside God in bringing the kingdom into fruition.

Back in 1939 with England on the brink of war, King George VI made famous a poem by Minnie Louise Haskins called “God Knows.”

The poem begins with these lines . . .

And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year: "Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown". And he replied: "Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the Hand of God. That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way."

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My friends, as you and I stand at the gate of a new year, can we put our hand into the Hand of God and trust the newness that God is doing?

When we put our hand into someone else's hand, that action insists on proximity.

When we slip our hand into God's, we are forced to acknowledge that God is with us — not far off with us, but right here with us.

God is so close that we can put our hand in God's and be reminded that God has been here all along and is ever eager to be our companion through the challenges and joys of life as we walk through time.

Life is hard. There is no question about that. But walking closely with God allows us to notice what is important to God and to allow the newness that God is offering to each of us to take root so we can carry that newness to the world.

Are we ready to turn and face the new year hand-in-hand with God?