

“A Singular New Year’s Resolution”
Oak Grove Presbyterian Church
I Thessalonians 5:16-18
Bill Chadwick
Sunday, January 1, 2012

Perhaps it’s a vocational hazard. During the week before Christmas I was working diligently to finish up plans forLent.

My style is always to be thinking ahead: What preparations need to be made? What has been left undone?

It’s not uncommon for me to run into someone at Cub on Tuesday and have them say something like, “I really appreciated your sermon on Sunday” and for me to respond, “Thanks. I’m glad you found it to be helpful....(pregnant pause as I’m wracking my memory...) “Can you remind me what it was about?” I could tell the person all about next Sunday’s sermon and often I can give the theme of each of the sermons for the next several months, but last Sunday’s....?

As I said, perhaps it’s a vocational hazard. In fact, it must be given the name: *presbyopia*—a condition in which the lens of the eye loses its ability to focus, making it difficult to see objects up close.

I don’t want to be this way. My wife has urged me to take a class on “mindfulness.” And maybe I will. “Mindfulness” is what the Buddhists call it. Brother Lawrence, the seventeenth century French lay brother is known for “practicing the presence of God.” His primary role in the monastery was in the kitchen. He said that no matter what he was doing, even washing dishes, he tried to be aware of God’s presence with him in the doing of dishes. A great role model.

Nowadays if I am walking the dog I am trying to do precisely that: walk the dog. Unless there is a really important game on I usually don’t take a radio. I don’t carry an iPod. I walk the dog. I enjoy his excitement at all the smells and sounds of the evening. I appreciate the Christmas lights. The moon and stars. When I start to think about church—or home—and obsess about all that is left undone I try to bring myself back, take a deep breath and...watch the dog. His simple pleasure. I give thanks for my breath, for my feet that don’t hurt much any more since surgery, and so on.

That’s my only new year’s resolution. To be mindful. Of whatever I am doing or to be mindful of whom I am with at the moment.

Bruce Northam, author of *The Frugal Globetrotter*, wrote this in the *National Geographic Traveler*. It's a short piece entitled *A Ramble in Wales*.

My father and I walk together a lot. Last summer we undertook a 180-mile trek across Wales, coast-to-coast along Offa's Dyke--the grand earthwork project conceived in the eighth century by King Offa of Mercia to separate England from Wales. Our walk was a celebration of sorts. A year earlier, my father, who was then 70, had undergone open-heart bypass and back surgery. Now we were walking together atop the long, curving ridge-boundary of Brecon Beacons National Park. Enroute we befriended Erica, a Welsh woman who was clearly oblivious to the beck and call of stress. At dusk the three of us encountered an elderly lady and her beagle hiking toward us. Teetering along on a walking stick, she wore a motoring cap and held a bunch of wildflowers. I said hello and asked her where she was going. She replied in Welsh, "*Rydw i yna yn barod.*" We looked to Erica for a translation.

"She said, 'I'm already there.'"

They continued their placid conversation in Welsh until the old woman resumed her walk. As she faded into the distance, I declared my envy for her simple philosophy. "Let's catch up with her. There's something else I'd like to ask." We spun around and caught up with her. She walked a few more steps along the trail, traded her flowers to the other hand and raised an eyebrow.

Erica translated my question, "What's the secret to a long and happy life?"

The old woman and I scrutinized each other for an instant, beings from different eras and opposite sides of an ocean. She directed her answer to Erica. "Moments." There was a quiet pause. Then the old woman smiled, squinted at my father, and spoke slowly, "Moments are all we get. A true walker understands this."

After a silent minute, we all clutched hands with the old woman, then we waved good-bye. As she trudged off with eternal poise and bearing. As we turned to continue on our way, my father and I exchanged smiles.

Moments. They're all we get.

BRUCE NORTHAM's books include *The Frugal Globetrotter* and *In Search of Adventure: A Wild Travel Anthology*.