

NO REGRETS
New Year's Day January 1, 2017 –Revelation 20: 11 through 20: 5
The Church of the Covenant

You may have seen the TV commercial with the man receiving a tattoo from a woman eating a Snickers Bar. She has just misspelled his tattoo and written permanently on his arm, NO REGERTS. (Instead of “no regrets”) Then she says, “Sorry, I was eating a Snickers Bar.” Sometimes our regrets feel like a bad tattoo that we carry around with us permanently for the rest of our life. Can we live our life ultimately with “No regrets”? Is the New Year a good time to commit our life to living it as regret-free as possible? This sermon began as I read an article by a Spanish priest noting the 21 things that people often say on their deathbed, the regrets they express as they are about to head into eternity. It prompted me to self-reflection and consideration of the regrets in my own life. What would I say were my regrets?

I regret that time during a youth group meeting at King's Restaurant where I was sitting across from my friend Derrick Jones and a GIANT plastic salad bowl of ice cream (I think it was named “The Terminator”) was placed in front of us. Guys being competitive and all, we commenced to try to eat the whole twenty scoops of ice cream, and brownies, and whipped cream, and bananas, and cherries, and to see which of us could eat more and out do the other. Many regrets on that day. But there were no regrets having fun with a wonderful young man and those kids, laughing a lot and doing something I will remember for the rest of my life. No regrets.

I regret that time I was on a Mission Trip to Kenya and was invited to come to a youth group meeting in Elburgon, a neighboring community to N'joro where we were staying and took the little matatoo (a small micro-mini bus holding at most four people in it, but which was crammed with at least 12 people, smashing my head against the glass and having it held there by two other Kenyan heads). And in Kenya youth group meets every day for at least two hours beginning at 5:00 p.m. where the 20-something young people lead the high schoolers in Bible Study, prayer and preaching and worship. They got so excited that Pastor was there the meeting went on and on and on, until after 9:00 p.m. I said that I had to go back to N'joro and they said, “Sorry, Pastor, the matatoos don't run after dark, so I got to sleep that night in my clerical collar shirt, fully clothed, in a small bed with four other Kenyans. I got up the next morning and took the matatoo back to N'joro and the kids from my youth group were all standing there pointing to the wrist watches, noting that I had violated the first rule of all mission trips, --stay with the group, be on time, don't get lost. And they said, “You know the rules, Stu, we have to call your parents and send you home!” Regrets about being late. But “no regrets” about having the time of my life with those wonderful and amazing young people in Kenya.

I regret the time I was traveling to England to officiate at the wedding of a dear friend, a former youth advisor in a former church of mine, marrying the beautiful Fiona. I was traveling by train with his groomsmen. We were in Paddington Station in London and were scheduled to take the 653 train North. So I went up to the information booth and asked the helpful man behind the counter, “Sir, what time does the 653 depart?” And without so much as cracking a smile he said, “Why at 6:53, Sir.” “Any other questions?” Yes, while I have you here, may I ask, “And who is buried in Grant's Tomb?” I may regret looking as foolish as Captain Obvious but I do not ever regret “being there” for my good friend on his wedding day. No regrets.

I had regrets during the time just recently where I went to lunch at the home of a good friend and we started talking about many things and he asked me about The Lord's Prayer, why there are different versions of it, why, for example, the Presbyterian one includes “For thine is the kingdom and the power

and the glory” and the Roman Catholic one doesn’t. Or that the Methodists use “trespasses and those who trespass against us” but Presbyterians use “debts and debtors”. Honestly I didn’t have a good answer. So we got out our Bibles and looked it up and we discovered that the one the Presbyterians use is from the King James Version of the Bible and the other versions come from other versions of the Bible. I regret being in ministry for more than 30 years and wondering the same question and never taking the time to look it up. But I most definitely do not regret opening the Bible with my friend and finally figuring out the answer. That time was precious and blessed. No regrets.

I had regret when I traveled to upstate Maine a year ago October to preach at the funeral service of my friend and mentor, Dr. Veon. He sowed so many seeds of faith and ministry in me. He taught me that “all things are possible with God”. To never limit what the church can do; never say something is impossible; never be anything less than bold for the Lord. About a year before he had invited me to come North and bring some books and study with him in his beautiful but isolated cottage, way up North, 3 hours away from the nearest grocery store. But I was too busy with other things to go. But I went for his funeral and shared everything he taught me and to so many people over so many years. And as I was there sharing I thought to myself that I bring with me every day of my ministry everything Dr. Veon taught me. Precious are those lessons. He still speaks to me. Blessed are those ideas he sowed into my heart. No regrets.

Some days I will think of my dear Father who passed away in July and think, “I wish I had asked him about this. Or I wish we had talked about that.” And my heart begins to fill with regret. But then I remember those precious exchanges we had, those moments where I knew that he knew that I love him, and he knew that I knew that he loves me. I think of his strong faith and trust in the Lord Jesus. I remember that I get to see him again. I remember that I have all eternity to speak with him and ask him every question that I didn’t ask in this lifetime. I don’t regret that we share the faith that gives us eternal life. The love we share in this life is precious and blessed. No regrets.

When I had my call to go into ministry I had a very vivid dream. I was standing up in a great White Pulpit and I was preaching. I had never seen myself doing that. Me, a preacher? No, never. But in the midst of that vision I felt called to preach and to speak about the Lord, and the Gospel, and all that He has done for me in my life. The picture of that Great White Pulpit in that dream is so clear in every detail. I can describe it to you at length. And then throughout my ministry I have sought to find that Great White Pulpit. When I visit a city I go to different churches just to find it. Was I one day to serve a church that had exactly the Great White Pulpit in it that I saw in my dream? Was I to seek it out and try to go to that church? Had I missed the mark somehow? By my own sin and spiritual cluelessness had I missed the Great White Pulpit? Was this to be my profoundest of all regrets? John Greenleaf Whittier wrote: “For all sad words of tongue and pen, the saddest are these, ‘It might have been’”. But every time I have the opportunity to come before people and to preach about Jesus it is a great privilege to me. Every time I get to point to the Master as the source of our life and the giver of eternal life I am filled with joy. I love being with you, with the very people God has called me to serve. To speak out of my heart and into yours. To be able to speak of spiritual things to give you hope and strength. I love being with you. I love spending time with you. No Great White Pulpit satisfies as much as being here. No regrets.

There is a day coming, it is the day of The Great White Throne mentioned in our scripture from the book of Revelation. It is a day of entry into the presence of One True and Living God seated upon the Great White Throne. And “*books were opened*” (Revelation 20: 12) and all becomes clear. All that has been murky and “seeing in a glass darkly” becomes illumined and crystal clear by the shining radiance of the glory of God. And there is a new heaven and a new earth and a new Jerusalem, the hope which lives in

every Christian's heart that God's will will be done on earth as it is in heaven, that hope becomes real and comes down out of heaven as a gift. And God wipes every tear from our eyes. And reconciles all that is unreconciled in this life. He completes everything that remains incomplete and brings it all to completion in the day of Jesus Christ. The former things have all passed away. **It is a moment and a place of NO REGRETS.** And the promise is fulfilled "*Behold, says Jesus, I make all things NEW.*" (Revelation 21: 5) There seeing Jesus "face to face", there in the presence of God, there before the Great White Throne there is NO REGRET. Then perhaps I have the opportunity to say to Jesus directly what a difference He has made in my life, and testify to all He has done around me, and to be able to thank Him in person and to profess my love for Him face to face. Perhaps, in the end that is The Great White Pulpit fulfilled in the presence of the Great White Throne.

I conclude with this. I think for us all the perfect spiritual exercise for the beginning of this new year is to consider that moment on our own deathbed, what regrets we might share. I regret I did not spend enough time with people. I regret I did not spend enough time with God. I regret the people I did not forgive. I regret the things I did not let go of. I regret the words I did not speak and things left undone. And then to consider a plan to live your life going forward with NO REGRETS. You can do this. I have great confidence in you and I have even greater confidence in the Lord. Amen and Amen.

*By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, Pennsylvania
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*