“Yesterday is gone, tomorrow is not promised to us – all we have is today”

Mildred Graham

As I write this newsletter it is the week before Christmas and I am having to force myself to think about the New Year. On January 1st, the year 2016 will be history and most of 2017 will still be ahead of us. It is that perspective I am thinking of.

Last month I wrote about the poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow called I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day. The poem was very special in my Christmas Celebration of 2016 and I hope it was for you too.

However, that poem has also began to impact my 2017 already. A few weeks ago, out of curiosity, I began to read some more poetry by Longfellow. I was led to a poem he wrote and published in 1838 – more than twenty years before he wrote I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day. The poem is called A Psalm of Life and, while lengthy, is printed here:

Tell me not, in mournful numbers,  
     Life is but an empty dream!—  
For the soul is dead that slumbers,  
     And things are not what they seem.  
  
Life is real! Life is earnest!  
     And the grave is not its goal;  
Dust thou art, to dust returnest,  
     Was not spoken of the soul.  
  
Not enjoyment, and not sorrow,  
     Is our destined end or way;  
But to act, that each to-morrow  
     Find us farther than to-day.  
  
Art is long, and Time is fleeting,  
     And our hearts, though stout and brave,  
Still, like muffled drums, are beating  
     Funeral marches to the grave.  
  
In the world's broad field of battle,  
     In the bivouac of Life,  
Be not like dumb, driven cattle!  
     Be a hero in the strife!  
  
Trust no Future, howe'er pleasant!  
     Let the dead Past bury its dead!  
Act,—act in the living Present!  
     Heart within, and God o'erhead!  
  
Lives of great men all remind us  
     We can make our lives sublime,  
And, departing, leave behind us  
     Footprints on the sands of time;  
  
Footprints, that perhaps another,  
     Sailing o'er life's solemn main,  
A forlorn and shipwrecked brother,  
     Seeing, shall take heart again.  
  
Let us, then, be up and doing,  
     With a heart for any fate;  
Still achieving, still pursuing,  
     Learn to labor and to wait.

When I first reads those words by Longfellow I was instantly reminded of Mildred Graham’s words above which I often use when I am praying in church. Both Ms. Mildred in her prayers and Longfellow in his poem call us to put the past behind us, to not take the future for granted, but instead to live actively each and every day.

I hope 2017 is a prosperous and wonderful year for all of us. But let’s take it one day at a time. Let’s start on January 1st to be the best we can be each and every. And then if we are blessed with a January 2nd or any other days we can work to make them equally great.

Happy New Year,

Pastor Tim