

## “Cultivating What Has Eternal Value in the New Year”

Scripture: Psalm 103:8-19 | The Message; Luke 13:6-9 and

Galatians 6:1-10 | The Message

Rev. Mary Bowman

December 28, 2025



First Presbyterian  
Church of Charlotte

I do not know what this year has held for you, but I do know that it has been a hard year for many.

Many of us have lost loved ones to death or to dementia or to addiction.

Many of us have felt disoriented by the division that feels so prevalent in our country.

Many of us carry regrets about something that happened this year.

Many of us are having trouble forgiving sins that we have committed or that have been committed against us.

Many of us have situations that remain unresolved . . . like illness or a difficult relationship.

Regardless of how hard a year has been, we can always find God’s fingerprints on our lives.

We can always hear a wisdom that is being whispered.

We can always be surprised by new possibilities.

Our Old Testament reading sets the framework for our reflections.

In this reading, we are reminded that our God is a God of “sheer mercy and grace.”

The God who created us and knows us better than we know ourselves . . . as the reading said, “knows us inside and out.”

When we look back in honesty about the last year and gaze at our gifts and our challenges and our imperfections and failings, we do so with a God who does not hold grudges or hold onto our wrong doings.

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Several years ago when I was a younger mother of two young boys, I remember having a particularly challenging day as a parent. It was not the first time — and it would not be the last time — but I remember feeling as though I was not doing anything right as a parent. I needed some advice so I called my sister-in-law who had been an elementary school teacher and was then home-schooling her children. We talked for a while and she gave me some good parenting ideas, but she also gave me the profound gift of encouragement. She said something that I have not forgotten. She reminded me that what I was doing as a parent had eternal value.

Eternal value.

Hmm . . . that conversation got me thinking about what has eternal value and what doesn’t.

It got me thinking about how I saw the world and my role in it.

In a fresh way, I was reminded that I was a partner in the things that mattered to God, the eternal things, the holy and sacred things, the things of life.

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Eternal value can be found in those things that are connected to and valued by God and that we are invited to be a part of.

As we straddle 2025 and 2026, it is a natural time to think about eternal things, to think about our lives, and to consider what matters, what is important.

Jesus invites this very conversation in our Gospel reading.

There is an apple tree (or fig tree in other translations) that is not yielding any fruit. The owner questions whether the tree should be chopped down since it is not yielding any fruit.

The gardener makes the argument that he would like to tend to the tree for the next year and see whether it might yield something.

As we reflect on our own lives, we might ask if there is something vocationally or relationally that does not seem to be bearing any fruit. We might ask the question . . . what does God want me to continue with in the coming year? And what might God want me to let go?

Are there apple trees in our lives that it might be time to chop down, to let go?

What are we being called to let go of . . . regrets? grudges? enterprises that seem fruitless?

And what are we being called to spend more time nurturing to see if the extra nurturing will make a difference . . . maybe it is a job you’re not sure of? maybe it is a question of timing about a decision? maybe it is a relationship that seems stuck and you wonder about your role in its future? maybe it continuing with the work of grief and healing rather than quitting too soon.

I love the invitation that this parable brings about whether it is time to let go of certain things in our lives and about whether it is time to double-down on certain things to see if they might bear fruit.

All of this is — of course — best done in the company of God. God is the best gardener and guide about how we resolve the challenges of the present year and what enterprises we commit to in the coming year.

In a similar way, the Galatians passage invites a broader look at the ways we are living. Have we fallen into certain ruts that need to be looked at more creatively? Have we fallen into the habit of comparing ourselves to others and coming up short rather than seeing ourselves through God’s eyes, as someone beloved of God with a purpose.

When I think about things with eternal value they almost all have something to do with relationships — Relationships with ourselves, with one another, with our neighbor, and with God.

Relationships are of course places of high risk but also high reward.

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We can never show up perfectly to any relationship . . . but God is also at work in relationships . . . to redeem regrets, to create forgiveness and reconciliation . . . to create opportunities for us to serve others and to leave our egos behind.

Love has eternal value. Finding a way to love within our immediate families (often the hardest space) and our global families has eternal value.

As we look back over the year, I encourage us to look through the lens of gratitude . . . what are all of the gifts we have received this year?

As we look back over the year, can we look through the lens of forgiveness and reconciliation?

As we look back over the year, can we ask God to guide us into what needs tending and what needs to be let go?

The quotation<sup>1</sup> at the top of the bulletin is a worthy goal. Did we somehow let go of our grasp on God? If so, all we have to do is slip our hand into God's again . . . the God who is ever with us, for us, and in us. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year, “Give me 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.” So I went forth and, finding the hand of God, trod gladly into the night. - Minnie Louise Haskins, “God Knows”