

- Sunday service, January 2nd, 1977. (tone beeps) (joyous organ music) (joyous music continues)

- Let us pray. Oh, holy God, Your word is near, Your grace is near. Come to us, then, with mildness and power. Do not let us be deaf to You. Help us to be open and receptive, that we may worship You in spirit and in truth. Amen. Amen. (lively organ music) (group singing indistinctly) (organ music and singing continues) We deceive ourselves, but not God, when we say we have no need to make a confession of our sins. With the assurance that we can receive forgiveness and be made whole, let us now make our corporate confession. Let us pray. Ever blessed God who came in great humility, we are slow to live for Christ, we know Him to be true, but we turn to worship personal gods and public idols. We have little care for the poor or those of different skin or for folk in ravage villages across the sea, or even for our neighbor across the street or down the hall. The valleys are deep, gouged out by many a pretense. The hills are high, built by our human pride. So we confess our sins. Only by You are they understood. Only when offered to You can they be forgiven and the sting of them dropped. Forgive us and help us to forgive others and ourselves, then set us to build the King's highway, that the valleys may be filled, and the hills made low, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. Amen. Accept God's forgiveness and this promise; "Behold, I make all things new." Believe this, and live this. Amen. ("I Wonder As I Wander") ♪ I wonder as I wander ♪ ♪ Out under the sky ♪ ♪ How Jesus my Savior ♪ ♪ Did come for to die ♪ ♪ For poor on'ry people ♪ ♪ Like you and like I ♪ ♪ I wonder as I wander ♪ ♪ Out under the sky ♪ ♪ When Mary birthed Jesus 'twas in a cow's stall ♪ ♪ With wise men and farmers and shepherds and all ♪ ♪ But high from God's heaven ♪ ♪ The star's light did fall ♪ ♪ And the promise of ages ♪ ♪ It then did recall ♪ ♪ If Jesus had wanted for any wee thing ♪ ♪ A star in the sky or a bird on the wing ♪ ♪ Or all of God's angels in heav'n for to sing ♪ ♪ He surely could have it ♪ ♪ 'Cause He was the King ♪ ♪ I wonder as I wander ♪ ♪ Out under the sky ♪ ♪ How Jesus the Savior ♪ ♪ Did come for to die ♪ ♪ For poor on'ry people like you and like I ♪ ♪ I wonder as I wander ♪ ♪ Out under the sky ♪

- Hear the reading from Isaiah the 40th chapter; "Why do you say, oh, Jacob, and speak, oh, Israel; 'My way is hid from the Lord and my right is disregarded by God'? Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the Earth. He does not faint or grow weary. His understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might, He increases strength. Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall down exhausted, but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, and they shall mount up with wings like eagles, and they shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint." Hear the second reading from the first chapter of Hebrews; "In many and various ways, God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets. But in these last days, He has spoken to us by a Son whom He appointed as the heir of all things, through whom also He created the world. He reflects the glory of God, and bears the very stamp of His nature, upholding the universe by the word of His power. When He had made purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels, as the name He has obtained is more excellent than theirs. For to what angel did God ever say, 'Thou art my son. Today I have begotten thee'? Or, again, 'I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to Me a son.' And again, when He brings the firstborn into the world, He says,

'Let all God's angels worship Him.' Of the angels, He says, 'Who makes his angels, winds, and His servants, flames of fire?' But of the Son He says, 'Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever. Thy righteous scepter is the scepter of Thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness and hated lawlessness. Therefore God, Thy God, has anointed Thee with the oil of gladness beyond Thy comrades. And Thou, Lord, didst form the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of Thy hands. They will perish, but Thou remainest. They will all grow old like a garment, like a mantle, Thou wilt roll them up, and they will be changed. But Thou art the same, and Thy years will never end.' But to the angels, has He ever said, 'Sit at My right hand till I make Thine enemies a stool for Thy feet?'" Here ends the reading of God's Word for today. Amen. (joyous organ music) (group singing indistinctly) Let us affirm what we believe. We believe in God, who has created and is creating, who has come in the truly human Jesus to reconcile and make new. Who works in us and others by the Spirit. We trust God, who calls us to be the church, to celebrate life at its fullest, to love and serve others, to seek justice and resist evil, to proclaim Jesus crucified and risen, our Judge and our Hope, in life, in death, in life beyond death, God is with us. We are not alone. Thanks be to God. The Lord be with you.

- And with your spirit.

- Let us pray. Oh holy and loving God, we give You thanks for our past and our future. We are grateful that every day offers us new opportunities and new possibilities. We celebrate the beginning of a new year and pray Your guidance as we move into the unknown future. We give You thanks for being alive today, for this Earth, for food and light and rest, for family and friends, and the joys of celebrating Your gift to us. We are thankful that You came to us in human form, that You humbled yourself that we might be free. That You became poor, that we might be rich. That You became human, that we might become Your true sons and daughters. Hear us now as we pray for our brothers and sisters. For those who are beginning a new life together, that they may find peace and fulfillment and permanence in the relationship. For those who are beginning a new job, that they may find satisfaction and a sense of value in their work. For those who have found no response to their longings and affections, that they may find hope and love. For those who lack the most vital necessities, that their life may be abundant with that which they most need. And, oh God, we pray for the health of all those who are ill. Due opportunities for those who have failed. For confidence and energy for those who are disappointed. And we pray for those who are ill-used and in poverty, that they may meet with justice. Help us, oh God, also to pray for those people who cause poverty and hunger and injustice. And now, send Your Spirit to us, to open our eyes and ears so that we may see You where we are afraid to look, hear You in voices which offend our ears. Oh God, we often seek You in the spectacular and the extraordinary, and yet You come to us in the poor, the hungry, the thirsty, the diseased, the imprisoned, the lowly. Teach us to see You, hear You, touch You, know where You really are, and not where we would like for You to be. All this we pray in the Spirit of the One who taught us to pray together; "Our Father who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on Earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever and ever." Amen. We are sorry that Annette Hook is sick with a cold and could not sing today, but we appreciate John Hanks substituting for her. It was one year ago on the first Sunday of this past year that we began celebrating holy communion after the morning worship in the Memorial Chapel. We invite you to begin the new year by celebrating communion.

- May I say a word of welcome to you on this, the first Sunday of the new year? We apologize for the coolness of this place, but when the temperature stays in the 20s and below, there just seems to be nothing we can do to warm it up. So, I suggest that maybe you might want to scoot a little closer together to be warm this morning. "Now may the words of my lips and the meditations of our hearts, O God, be acceptable in Thy sight." For we pray through Christ, our Lord, amen. In Roman mythology, Janus was the god of beginnings and endings. Shown with two heads, one looking backward, and one looking forward. This is January. This is, particularly, the 1st of January. As we all look back, and as we all look ahead, looking back to the past and looking ahead to the future calls forth ambivalent feelings in most, if not all, of us. Somewhat like those feelings expressed by the contemporary preacher/theologian who writes, "What I recall and what was are not the same. What I have intended and what I have done are not the same. Where I have gone and where I have wished to go are different. My past is not there, as I remember it, for most of the bad has slipped out somewhere. My future is not as I expect it, for much of the good will slip out of it somewhere." So on this first Sunday of the year, 1977, we recall what was and what was intended. We recall where we intended to go, and where we have gone. The past surely is not quite as we remember it. And the future surely will not be quite as we expect it to be. There is a word in the writings of Paul, in his little book to the church at Philippi, Philippians 3:13-14, that seems highly appropriate as a word to begin the new year. "One thing I do," he writes, "One thing I do; forgetting what lies behind, and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." John DeFoore pens this poem in a letter to a friend; "Why is suffering so fruitful, and joy so barren? Why can I so quickly forget the moment I laughed and remember so well my despair and my tears? I hate tragedies, fruitful womb! When God's child comes close to livingness, why is he closest to death? Can spirit, eternal love, only be born on the abyss of extinction? Has anguish more commonness for us than ecstasy, Dan?! But cannot life marry joy and beget children? Does only the prisoner know freedom? Could not, cannot, the free person know freedom unscarred with chains? Does a man hear his ninth symphony only when he is deaf? If life is reality and no fantasy, why does it so well in the shadow of dissolution? Does creation beget a child so imperfect that he must die before he can begin to live?" What is it that makes life? Is it only tragedy? Can we who think we are free really know freedom without having to go into prison? Does life only have meaning when we come close to losing it? How do we begin to live? Can life be good in the light as well as in the dark, in the day, as well as in the night? What is it that makes life, yours or mine, or anyone's? Carl Sandburg has a word in his poem, "Timesweep". "Tell me," he writes, "About any strong, beautiful wanting, and there is your morning, my morning, everybody's morning." And what's in a morning? What is in a wanting? What is in a strong and beautiful wanting? Morning is hope. Morning is new, is fresh, is clear, is open-ended, is uncluttered, is possibility. Morning is uncommitted. Morning is free. It is the dew drops and soft sun's rays. It is fresh footprints in the snow. Morning, any morning, is a new start. Everybody's morning is a time when we can take things up again. Do we not all need a time for stopping, resting, looking at life, being renewed, and then taking up those things of life again? "One thing I do," Paul said, "Forgetting those things which lie behind, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus, my Lord." Forgetting, I press on. The end of one year and the start of a new year is a very good time to forget. And as I think about last year in my own life, there is much I would like to forget. The hurt I have caused. The hurt I have not helped to heal. The hurt I have suffered. The wrong decisions I have made. The wrongs in this community, on this campus, and in other places, which I have not helped to right. The wrongs which I have ignored or have

been indifferent to, or the wrongs which I have said, "Hey, they're okay after all." The people I have not visited in jails or hospitals or homes or institutions or families. I was reading in Christian Century, an article entitled, "The Christmas Visit", and I thought this would be a charming, uplifting kind of little tale of somebody going to visit somebody on Christmas day. But it was the telling of a visit to a mental hospital by a middle-aged man to see his mother. He finishes by saying, "You say, 'I'll see you soon,' and she says, 'Come back real soon now,' but do either of you really mean it or believe it?" Yes, I'd like to forget my failures to visit those who are lonely and ignored. I'd like to forget the sloppy job that I've done at times this past year as a father, as a husband, as a preacher, as a pastor, as a minister of my Lord's Gospel. I'd like to forget some of the poor work that I have done when other's expectations were high or, even worse still, when I knew, I knew that I could do better than I really had done! I'd like to forget some of the sin I have committed. The things I have done which I should not, and the things I have not done which I should have done. I'd like to forget my failure to pray more, study more, write and read and prepare myself mentally and spiritually more. Yes, I don't know about you, but there is much, very much, I'd like to forget in 1976. But there are some things I cannot forget! For example, there are those moments which I cannot forget when I have really hurt. And there are those moments I cannot forget when I have known true beauty, in nature, in reading, in a relationship, in worship, in this place. When I have known true beauty at home. There is those moments which I cannot forget, those moments of love, love given. Yes, and love received. There are those moments of affirmation which I cannot forget, moments of affirmation way beyond what I deserve, but surely not beyond what I want or what I need, nor beyond what I am grateful for. There are those moments of hope which I cannot forget, at home with our family, as new levels of maturity and understanding have come. Those moments of hope, which I have known within myself. There is a very real sense in which I must say, "I cannot forget. I do not want to. I will not forget some of what lies behind." And Carl Sandburg again, in his little poem, "High Moments", writes, "Remembering high loveliness hovers in time and is made of passing moments. I have kept high moments, for they go round and round in me." And I have kept mine. But, as Paul so aptly reminds us, there is a time to forget what lies behind. Some of those things which we might forget; forget any personal grudges which we have toward others. Anyone can be bitter and resentful, but it takes someone who cares about others, who is willing to forgive as he or she seeks to be forgiven, to forget past personal hurt and move on to good and healthy attitudes. So let us forget, and move beyond hatred and suspicion and jealousy. Forget those things which cause anxiety or worry. Jesus said, "Take no thought about tomorrow. Be not anxious." Constant worry and anxiety often belie a lack of faith in God. If God is really in charge of your life, or my life, then let God be in charge. Let us put our trust in God, stop worrying, and get on with living. Forget those times, those moments, those experiences, those feelings of unfaithfulness to God. All of us have sinned and have been less than what God intended us to be. But constant brooding over how bad one has been, or how much one has failed, or how careless and indifferent to God one has been, can be a kind of self-pity that borders on pride and self-righteousness. If we confess our sin, it is God who is faithful and just, not we! And it is God who forgives us through the blood of Jesus Christ. And that is why, in corporate worship here every week, we have time to confess, then receive pardon and assurance, and forget. Forget some of our demands from life and from others. One of the things that continues to impress and amaze me is how much some people demand or expect from other people. And for Christians, particularly, this seems incongruous. After all, there was a point in life when each of us who claims the name of Christ surrendered all for the sake of Christ. Paul wrote, "It is not I, but Christ, who really counts in life." How much more pleasant and satisfying life would be for many others if we were willing to

give up self some for the sake of others? If we are to take things up again, then we must first lay them down. That is, we must put them behind us. If we are to press on toward the mark of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus, we must forget what lies behind. It was Meister Eckhart who wrote, "Only the hand that erases can write the true thing. Only the hand that erases can write the true thing." Forget, erase, write, press on. This matter of taking things up again, of pressing on, it is not really new. It is as old as the story of Adam and Eve who looked back on the luxury of the Garden of Eden and then started out to earn their living by the sweat of the brow. It's as old as the story of Noah and his family leaving the ark, looking out on all the desolation that surrounded them and then turning to start life all over again. It's the story of Moses turning aside from the burning bush and going back to Egypt to persuade Pharaoh to let his people go so that they might start life anew. It is the story of the people of Israel living in Egypt, leaving Egypt, struggling 40 years to settle, and to start life all over again in the Promised Land. It's a story of Jesus being baptized, being driven into the wilderness, and returning to Nazareth to start His life all over again. It's the story of the woman taken in adultery, publicly accused, personally forgiven, and perennially restored to begin life again. It's the story of all of the disciples, walking with Jesus, listening to Jesus, following Jesus, believing Jesus, believing in Jesus, and then leaving Jesus on Good Friday. Only to be called to try to start life all over again on Easter morning. The story of taking things up again, of beginning life anew, of pressing on, is a people's story. It is a corporate story. But it is also a person's story. It is first a story of a community, and then it is a story of an individual, both. It is life coming to a point of decision and change, even at times coming to an apparent end, only to begin again, only to be taken up again. Wherever you turn in the Bible, you find it filled with stories of men and women who, for one reason or another, had to take life up again. David Barber writing, in this weeks' Time Magazine writes about the coming of President Elect Carter to Washington, and says, "He comes to Washington as a man of high expectation, in a time when the people have low hopes." Is that true? There comes a point when we forget what lies behind, when we press on toward the upward call of God in Christ Jesus and take up life all over again. Life is to be taken up again, as Paul suggests, with us moving toward a goal, not moving just hither and yon. Moving with a purpose, that is, with something ahead of us, that is, moving toward a clear end in view. Seeing what it is toward which we go, toward the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. This movement is God initiated. It is God who calls us, through Christ. Paul's theology is Christ-centered through and through, and it is no less so in this passage, it is the risen and living Spirit of Christ that enables us to forget the past. I can't do it on my own! It is the Spirit of Christ that empowers us to strain forward to what lies ahead. I cannot do that on my own. It is the Spirit of Christ which inspires us to press on toward the upward call of God in Christ. I surely cannot move toward God on my own. So what is it that we need as we look back on '76 and look forward to '77? I don't really know how one forgets the past. I don't really even know how one presses on toward the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus, except, perhaps, to say simply, and honestly, and personally, Lord guide me, guide me into tomorrow, into next year, into my life, whatever it is, with all of its potential or lack of it, with all of its possibilities or lack of them. Lord, guide me. The inspiration for that simple word came to me as I read a prayer poem written by the Archbishop of Olinda and Recife, Brazil. Archbishop Dom Helder Camara; "Lord, guide me. If You try me, send me out into the foggy night so that I cannot see my way. Even if I stumble, this I beg, that I may look and smile serenely, bearing witness that You are with me, and that I walk in peace. Lord, if You try me, send me out into an atmosphere too thin for me to breathe, and I cannot feel the earth beneath my feet. But let my behavior show others that they cannot part me forcibly from You in whom we breathe and move and are. Lord, if You let hate hamper and trap me, twist my heart, disfigure me, then give

my eyes His love and peace. My face, the expression of the Christ." Let us pray. Oh God, as one year ends, as another begins, may we seek to do as Paul himself sought to do; to forget what lies behind, to strain toward what lies ahead and to press on toward the upward call which You have for us in Christ Jesus. Lord, at the beginning of a new year, guide us. Guide us personally, and guide us all together, through Jesus Christ who says, with loud and strong affirmation, that we might hear and that we might believe, "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending. Those who believed in Me shall live, and live abundantly." Through this same Christ we pray, amen. Amen. ("Hark the Herald Angels Sing") ♪ Hark the herald angels sing ♪ ♪ Glory to the newborn King ♪ ♪ Peace on Earth and mercy mild ♪ ♪ God and sinners reconciled ♪ ♪ Joyful all ye nations rise ♪ ♪ Join the triumph of the skies ♪ ♪ With angelic host proclaim ♪ ♪ Christ is born in Bethlehem ♪ ♪ Hark the herald angels sing ♪ ♪ Glory to the newborn King ♪ ♪ Christ by highest Heaven adored ♪ ♪ Christ the everlasting Lord ♪ ♪ Late in time behold Him come ♪ ♪ Offspring of the virgin's womb ♪ ♪ Veiled in flesh the Godhead see ♪ ♪ Hail the incarnate Deity ♪ ♪ Pleased with us in flesh to dwell ♪ ♪ Jesus our Immanuel ♪ ♪ Hark the herald angels sing ♪ ♪ Glory to the newborn King ♪ ♪ Hail the heav'n-born Prince of peace ♪ ♪ Hail the Son of Righteousness ♪ ♪ Light and life to all He brings ♪ ♪ Risen with healing in His wings ♪ ♪ Mild He lays His glory by ♪ ♪ Born that man no more may die ♪ ♪ Born to raise the some of earth ♪ ♪ Born to give them second birth ♪ ♪ Hark the herald angels sing ♪ ♪ Glory to the newborn King ♪ (peaceful organ music) ("This Endris Night") ♪ The other night I saw a light ♪ ♪ A star as bright as day ♪ ♪ And ev'r among a maiden sung ♪ ♪ Bye bye baby lullay ♪ (soft organ music continues) ♪ This virgin here who had no fear ♪ ♪ Unto her son did say ♪ ♪ I pray thee son grant me a boon ♪ ♪ To sing bye bye lullay ♪ ♪ That child or man who whoever can ♪ ♪ Be merry on this day ♪ ♪ And blessings brings so I shall sing ♪ ♪ Bye bye baby lullay ♪ ♪ Bye bye baby lullay ♪ ("All Creatures of Our God and King") ♪ Praise God from whom all blessings flow ♪ ♪ Praise Him all creatures here below ♪ ♪ Alleluia ♪ ♪ Alleluia ♪ ♪ Praise Him above ye heavenly hosts ♪ ♪ Praise Father Son and Holy Ghost ♪ ♪ Alleluia ♪ ♪ Alleluia ♪ ♪ Alleluia ♪ ♪ Alleluia ♪ ♪ Alleluia ♪ ♪ Amen ♪

- Here, O God, we offer and present unto You ourselves, our souls, and bodies to be a reasonable, holy and living sacrifice. We humbly beseech You to accept this offering and use it for Your work to make known Your love to all people through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (lively organ music) (group sings indistinctly) Go into this new year with the confidence that the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit will go with you and be with you. Amen. (organ music)
(people conversing)