



**Sermon:** January 2, 2022

**Scripture Reading:** Luke 17.1-4, 11-19

**The Message:** Good Riddance! Now What?

**[Video Version](#)**



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In 1992 the Blue Jays were playing the Atlanta Braves. I started to watch. The doorbell rang. It was a member who lived nearby, come to talk about what was going on in her life that frustrated her. By the time she left, the Blue Jays had won the World Series four games to two, marking the first time a team based outside the United States won the World Series.

A few days later, I found out that she had subsequently told the same story to someone in the congregation. It was pretty clear that any advice I'd given her had not registered at all.

In 1993 the Blue Jays were playing the Philadelphia Phillies. I started to watch. The doorbell rang. Same member, same story. By the time she left, the Blue Jays had won the World Series four games to two, marking the second time a team based outside the United States won the World Series.

Fortunately for me, but not the Blue Jays, there was never another World Series game to be disturbed.

I did feel kind of off kilter about these experiences. I was doing ministry, but it felt rather futile if I was just one of several listening to the same story.

But recently I was reading Sister Joan Chittister, Benedictine Nun extraordinaire, about how we mature through difficult times in our lives.

"When I am hurt," she writes, I am at Point A."  
I've got to move out of it. I've got to make "Point B" my new life, I've got to get interested in new ideas.

I've lost my job, I've been left out of this company, I'll find a new company.

I've been hurt by this person, I've got to trust another person.

But if I've been hurt by a person, I'll tell you all your life what so-and-so did to me. I've got to talk this thing to death until I've bored myself with the story and then I've got to understand that in this hurt, there is wisdom to be found. There is a shaping of the clay that is me and I have to give that the time to happen.

Ogden Nash has another way of describing this moment that we arrive at between the hurt and moving forward.

Come, children, gather round my knee;  
Something is about to be.  
Tonight's December thirty-first,  
Something is about to burst.  
The clock is crouching, dark and small,  
Like a time bomb in the hall.  
Hark! It's midnight, children dear.  
Duck! Here comes another year.

The title of this poem is, Good Riddance, But Now What?

In this moment, when we are clearing the deck for another year, there is a God-message; that's what we find when we have said, 'good riddance; now what?'

We can't wait to go on until I am feeling that everything is perfectly resolved from the past to say 'now what?'

I like this idea that we have to talk things out -- it helps all kinds of things to happen, like making a tragic event seem more real, to begin the process of other people knowing, and it not mattering so much to keep it inside or even secret; to begin the process of reaching a new normal.

But it isn't easy, and being on the other end isn't easy either.

When people come to us with pain, we are tempted to tell people, "Come on, you've got to get over that. Now just shape up." It's just so hard to listen.

And, yes, there is such a thing as continual obsession with hurt, but for most people, they are not obsessed with hurt. They are dying for understanding. "Just tell me that you're here where I am." And they may talk about it for a year -- until they have bored themselves with the story.

How do we move on in life through or past a life shattering event?  
Chittister writes,

“I have to realize this is a closed and final event.  
The guy who left me is not coming back.  
The woman who died is dead.

I know that. It will hurt forever, but I am now in a new space, in a new world.  
I've got to start at Point Zero and rebuild that way.

This is a way we can clear the decks at the beginning of the new year. Accept the hurt of the past as being hurt, but being hurt in the past. So today let's be satisfied with the cleared deck, so we can embrace the new year.

This is perhaps an unusual view of the scripture passage:

Be on your guard! If another disciple sins, you must rebuke the offender, and if there is repentance, you must forgive. And if the same person sins against you seven times a day, and turns back to you seven times and says, “I repent”, you must forgive.’ Luke 17:3-4

But when you accept that Jesus loves you as well as the person who has hurt you, then Jesus wants you to be at peace, and that means forgiveness, which is how we clear the decks.

Chittister believes that none of us is beyond help as long as we have decided that we will be new despite what has happened to us.

The passage begins by chastising anyone who causes another to stumble -- so while we are clearing the decks in our own hurts, it's really important to be sure we don't cause others hurt which puts them in the situation of needing to clear their decks.

And the passage ends with the one leaping leper who is healed by Jesus and comes back to give thanks. Once we have cleared the deck, with the grateful leper, we can give thanks to God for the new year and all it has to offer.