

God, Life, and Everything
For September 4
Back in the Saddle

To all my Jewish friends, let me first say, *Shanah Tovah!* Happy New Year! The beginning of a new year always opens up the world of possibilities, just as the possibilities were endless at the beginning of creation.

That's one reason New Years are so worth celebrating. They remind us what we can do - or at least dream about, because dreams are what make a better reality.

I'm also celebrating the beginning of something new this week - I have returned from nearly four months away on sabbatical.

You may say that that's not the same, but I disagree. Sabbatical is a time of study and renewal, but it's in the coming back that things feel new all over again. It's like going back to school after a long summer break. You've been busy all summer, and school feels familiar when you come back - and yet it's all new.

I did a lot of things while I was away, mind you. It was a busy time indeed. I went to school to learn some Spanish (you don't just "learn" a language in a few months). I wrote scripts for our Graveyard Tours (you *are* coming, aren't you?). I worked on converting our parish history into an e-book - not yet successful, but I'll keep working on it when I have free moments.

Mostly, though, I worked on pilgrimage project. My idea is that most people can't go on pilgrimages to Israel, Rome, Canterbury, Lourdes, Moscow or wherever is sacred. It's just too expensive, and least more than once in a lifetime. On the other hand, pilgrimage has evolved over the centuries such that the actual place you go isn't nearly as important as the going.

So I did some research, and I did some walking, and then I wrote a paper about creating a Rail Trail pilgrimage - a sacred prayerful walk in the tradition of the classic pilgrimages but without a particular place to go. The going, including some amount of rigor, will make it holy.

If you ever want to read a paper that is shorter yet more boring than I anticipated, let me know. I fully expect to implement a full, two-day walking retreat in our region using our wonderful rail trails for the path. If you want to know more about it, contact me.

Anyway, that, along with sending one son off to college and helping another with his Eagle Scout project, is what I've been doing all this time.

Now it's back in the saddle! And there is so much to do.

I want to welcome the new pastor at Hyde Park United Methodist, hoping we'll work closely together as colleagues.

I want to gear back up for Sunday School, Inquirers Classes, bible study and more.

I want to get back out and visit those who have trouble getting about.

I want to get back into the outreach ministries.

And yes, I want to preach. Last Sunday was my first time back in St. James' pulpit. It was fun, exciting (at least for me). We had a baptism, which I thought another perfect sign of new beginnings. It was also exhausting! After both services and coffee hour, I went home and passed out!

New beginnings - whether they're a new year, a new school term, a new life in baptism or a new start after a long sabbatical - afford us so many opportunities. A lot of them will never pan out, I'm sure, but I'm ready to grab them anyway. *Shanah Tovah!*