***Sermon Text for February 23, 2014***

*by Rev. Robert K. Bronkema*

*Joshua 4:1-7, John 20:30-31, 21:24-25*

“The end”

So, this is the end. Hard to believe, I know, but there is a lot to be said for getting through and getting to know this Gospel. For example if someone would ask you where is the story of Jesus turning water to wine? You would all be able to say the Gospel of John, and only in the Gospel of John. Where is the story of the raising of Lazarus from the dead? John and only John. How about the washing of the disciples’ feet? John and only John. How about in the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. But it all comes to an end today.

One of the reasons why I love John is because he explains why he writes certain things, he explains the miracles of Jesus and calls them signs that point to something far more important than the miracle itself. Today, in fact, two separate Scritpures in John we read why he wrote the Gospel, why he took the time to tell us about Jesus in the way that he did. Ultimately he wrote it to leave a legacy behind.

Both of our Scriptures for today point to a lasting, tangible legacy that we leave behind. We are talking about our faith. How do our children, how do those who come in the generations to follow, how do they come to know of our faith? Let’s ask that question as we look at the Scritpure for today.

I missed my alumni basketball game yesterday. It was probably a good thing. Last year I played my heart out in the first half, went to the restroom and got physically sick, and then came back and played the second half. I didn’t used to feel so terrible after playing a full game. I guess I’m getting old. You know, it takes a while before we start to realize that we actually are not invincible, when you actually realize that things are starting to fall apart.

How much time do we actually spend thinking about the end, our own mortality? There is a sense that we will live forever when we are teenagers and then when the kids come along our concerns don’t rest on us but rather on them and their safety. We don’t normally think of leaving a legacy behind, except maybe financially. At times leaving a financial legacy becomes our focus. But when the end comes, our end, the Bible speaks of a legacy that we are commanded to leave behind, and the Bible mentions it repeatedly, but a legacy that neither moth nor rust can consume.

Throughout the sermon today I want you to ask yourself this question. If today God called you back, what legacy would you leave behind that your kids could say: my mom and dad loved Jesus so much and I know it because they told me, or they did this particular thing. I think it is a fair question and one that we can all get started on today by looking at our Scripture.

Turn with me to our Old Testament reading. I hope you get a sense of what happened here. Let’s set the stage. Israel flees Egypt with Moses leading them out. They go from slavery to freedom but as we saw last week with the golden calf, they quickly forget how God had been faithful to them. God decides that this ungrateful generation shall not enter the promised land where they are heading. So for 40 years they wander in the wilderness, Moses dies and Joshua is raised up by God as the new leader.

Joshua is tasked with leading the Israelites out of the wilderness to the promised land and in order to step into the promised land they have to cross the Jordan which was overflowing with the Spring floods. I think all the snow must have melted at once. God tells Joshua tell the priests to stand in the Jordan, then I will make it part and you can enter the Jordan. You have to get your feet wet sometimes to see God’s miracles. You have to take risk, sometimes to know that God is able.

The Jordan parts and then today God tells Joshua, the first thing I want you to do in the promised land is to go back to the Jordan, get 12 stones and make a monument so that when your kids ask you about it, you can tell them. The very first act when they enter the promised land is to give glory to God by setting up a lasting legacy for all the generations to come. So if Joshua or any other person present that day may come to an end, the children will know about this.

Why 12 stones? Did you catch that? Because that meant that every single person in that family, called the nation of Israel would be represented. The assumption is that, look at vs. 6, when your children ask in time to come. The assumption is that the kids are going to ask. Why do we do certain things? The Bible is full of motivations to do certain things because you know, the kids are going to ask. Deuteronomy 6:4-7, recite them to your children. Throght the OT a lasting legacy of faith is really seen as the most important thing to leave behind.

Kids are going to ask, aren’t they? We don’t always have what we think is the right answer do we? In my earlier years as a pastor I was counseling with a young wife who had a 5 year old daughter and her husband, the child’s daughter had just taken his life. She would tell me the most difficult part was not having answers for the questions her daughter asked. We spent a lot of time together answering her questions on the foundation of our faith that before then the mother was afraid to address.

Your kids already ask you questions, I know they do. Story of Hail Mary. Joshua is told to facilitate those questions, encourage them, and leave a legacy of faith for your children so that the main fundamental question of our faith can be answered.

The Gospel of John likewise leaves behind a legacy of signs. Do you remember from our readings what another term for signs is? Constantly we read in the Gospel that all the miracles that Jesus performs is another sign that points to Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God. The hyield sign is probably the least followed sign. Merging onto 30 most cars instead of yielding do what? The stop, if they wanted you to stop they would have put a stop sign there. And if you miss the sign or read it wrong it can leave you in a bit of a pickle as well as those around you.

John at the end of his Gospel point to it as a book of signs all pointing to what and for what purpose? So that we would believe that Jeuss is the Messiah. Or as vs. 24 states it is a testiumony, a witness. And a true witness goes beyond an eyewitness report of exactly what happened. It includes the adaptation of what happened so that its truth can be seen by and be significant for subsequent generations. It’s not enough for a witness to speak to its day, it must speak to generations to come.

This book of John, in fact all of Scripture, is that memorial to God so that when the people see it and read it they can turn their eyes upon Jesus. So you are here today and you have heard of how people of faith have passed their legacy of faith down through the generations. In Joshua a movement to God’s love and deliverance. In John the Scritpures that guide and direct. But what can you do?

I do not recommend setting up a pile of rocks in the living room that your ids just can’t miss and will ask you every day, what is this? No, but I do recommend some simiple actionsso that your child will know your love for Jesus. For every dinner or supper, or your evening meal whatever you call it, which I assume is the one you all sit down together, of course you will pray, but read a single Scripture. It doesn’t have to be long. If the kids have questions they’ll ask it. Some of you are writing and discussing your Lenten devotions together, that is great. With kids or not you can do this together.

 Then, before your kid goes to sleep, just pray with them. May God bless you and keep you. That’s all. It will allow them to ask your questions. It will build up a legacy of faith that may or may not be very active today. Every action today is putting one more rock on top of another so that it becomes more and more visible as time goes by. It is adding one more word to the book so that it becomes more relevant to them as they grow older. So that when the end comes, they will have a legacy of faith to give thanks for. Amen.