

Sermon Text for July 31, 2022

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Jeremiah 9:23-24, II Timothy 4:6-8

“What legacy will you leave?”

The whole family was together this weekend. All of my daughters, my mom, all of my brothers because the first niece got married. It was awesome and it also provided an opportunity for us as brothers to realize that the baton is being passed to a younger generation which then inevitably means that you have to think about what legacy have you left behind, what will the new generation and the ones to follow think about what you have done and what you have accomplished and how God has used you. Maybe not everyone thinks about these things in these type of life events, but I do.

As we come out of the most wonderful week in the year of VBS it also requires is to reflect in a similar way, what are we passing down to the younger generation, what is the legacy that we are leaving behind as a church to those who are in our midst and what will they think of us as we fade away and they take on their positions of leadership. We hope in programs such as VBS we are laying a foundation of faith for generations to come. If we are just having a good time and addressing a parenting need for a break, well, then our legacy is pretty flimsy and not really worth the effort. If we are instilling within these children an understanding of the church and their faith that will serve them well for the rest of their lives, well, then that is something different.

Our legacy here at this church is so much more than what we do with our growing children and youth programs. For 190 years people have called this place their spiritual home. As I look around this church I know that you have been impacted by people in this church. You have been shaped in your faith and in your way of life because of your interactions and your relationships with people in this church. That is a positive thing, at least it should be a positive thing. That is the legacy that as a church we ought to leave behind.

Both of our Scriptures point to the type of legacy we ought to be leaving behind which is not of flesh and blood but of faith and love. Let's read.

READ

When we pick up in Jeremiah, who is called the weeping prophet, he finds himself in a time of catastrophic reality where the people of Israel are about to be conquered, Jerusalem is about to fall, and he asks the question in the midst of all this, what is it that the Lord requires, at

the end of the day what is really important that God wants us to do and be. It is the type of self-reflective question that we ought to ask from time to time. When a niece gets married, when we find ourselves in a milestone in our lives, birth, death, transition from working to retirement, you name a transition in your life and that is a time to think about what it is that the Lord requires of us.

Jeremiah states that when you take inventory of your life what you have accumulated is not really what matters, and we spend so much time accumulating. What you have done to pursue what delights God is really what matters. I have to be honest with you that every now and then my mind wanders and thinks about glory days that I have had and I ask the question if I am living out the full potential that God has intended for me. But then Jeremiah's reminder comes loud and clear. It is about pursuing those things that make a difference in the life of an individual here and now and then we have to let the rest go in the direction that God intends.

Let me give you an example. As I wonder whether I have allowed God to use me as God intended I get an email this week from someone named Tekudzwa Sasa. I believe he was in Rachel's confirmation class when we were in Russia. Here is what he said: "Hello pastor Bob, My name is Takudzwa Sasa, I'm a Medical Dr at a small rural mission Hospital in Zimbabwe called Karanda Mission Hospital. You were my pastor growing up in Moscow and I attended church at MPC. I'm not sure if you remember me but you helped me receive Christ when I was 17 and helped me prepare a small sermon that was once used in a youth led church service back then. Fast forward to 2022 I'm now working at a mission Hospital in the middle of what some would call nowhere trying to meet both medical and spiritual needs of a poor population in my home country of Zimbabwe. I wanna thank you pastor Bob for leading me towards something I thought wasn't as important in my life and helping me find Jesus early in my life."

You never know how God is going to use you and more often than not you don't get letters like these which reassure you that you are leaving a legacy behind that is of value. Teachers, you know what I'm talking about, all of us leave our mark on people with whom we come into contact. It is the most important thing we can leave behind.

Jeremiah tells us in vs.24 that we are to leave behind that which delights the Lord, and what is that? Steadfast love, righteousness. It is similar to what Micah says in 6:8 – "He has told you, o mortal, what is good and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God." Is this our legacy. Paul was pretty convinced that it was his legacy, he at least certainly hoped that it was in what we read in II Timothy.

We find ourselves in our second Scripture with the Apostles Paul, the one who wrote the vast majority of the New Testament, writing to someone that he calls his son various times in Scripture, this guy named Timothy. He loves Timothy, he has mentored Timothy, and now he tells him that he is about to die, he is in prison and he knows that his days are numbered. He isn't afraid, he is just telling him this is the legacy that I am leaving behind, this is what I hope you take from my time here on this earth.

These verses that we read are an intensely personal paragraph, like all discussions about legacy ought to be. During VBS someone in the church while we were wrapping up said something about a culture that has been created over the time that we have served together. 11 years is a good long time, and it is certainly enough time for a specific type of culture to be rooted and established to add to all the other legacies that have been left behind. I can tell you, like Paul tells Timothy, what I hope the type of culture we are building here looks like.

It looks like members of our church working for hours with a homeless client from our food bank until 6 months later she is able to procure housing and just last week this client moved into an apartment thanks to the tenacious work of persistence and faith by our church. The culture I hope that we are building is one where it is normal for us to receive a \$15,000 grant to use as we like to help meet the material needs of those who come to us with no questions asked. We have received the grant and we are about to distribute the funds through the CIC, the Community Impact Committee.

Paul says to Timothy that keeping the faith is the legacy he wanted to leave behind for people to follow. Notice Paul doesn't say the goal is to win the race. I have fought the good fight, I have run the race, I have kept the faith. For Paul the goal is to engage, to be involved, to make sure that it is your faith which leads you. It is not whoever amasses more wealth wins. It is whoever engages more with God's children in a way that provides them an insight and a path to faith is able to leave behind that which delights the Lord.

This is the time in your life when it is important to take that inventory and ask that question of what type of legacy am I leaving behind. Normally when we talk about that we think it is a financial question. This church has been blessed with people who have done that financially, I am not opposed to that. But that is not what we are discussing today. The question is what are you leaving behind as your legacy through the work of this church. What is your impact on people like Timothy, or Tekudzwa, or Kathy, or any of the 70 children that we had at VBS, or any person who walks into this church.

The knowledge of God in the eyes of the world so often appears confusing and mysterious, but it is our job to make it plain to the mind and open to the possibilities of faith. Paul ends by saying that he knows that he will receive the crown of righteousness, and not because he won anything, but because he engaged in a life of sharing his faith. He says that everyone who longs for Jesus' appearing, everyone who longs to be a part of the work of the kingdom of God through Jesus our Savior, they also will receive that crown.

But the fighting the good fight, the running of the race, and the keeping of the faith, that has to happen here and now, in this lifetime. May God bless us and keep us as we look to pursue that which brings God delight and which leaves behind a legacy of faith. Amen.