

“Legacy”

Wildwood Mennonite Church, June 9, 2019

This morning I’m going to talk about legacy. It is something I have actually started working on myself, and I’m thinking it’s a good thing for those of us here to consider. So I’m going to start by throwing out these questions: How do you think you will be remembered after you are gone? What, of your life experience, do you want to pass on? And how can you help to ensure that you are remembered in the way that you would want?

Now legacy, according to the dictionary, can mean a gift by will especially of money or other personal property; a bequest. But legacy can also mean something less tangible that is transmitted by or received from an ancestor or predecessor – and some examples of that might be to say that Peter left his children a legacy of love and respect, or that Anne’s artistic legacy lives on through her children.

The Bible is filled with stories of people who passed on an enduring legacy because of their faith. In Hebrews (Ch.11) we read:

⁴ By faith Abel brought God a better offering than Cain did. By faith he was commended as righteous, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith Abel still speaks, even though he is dead. ⁵ By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death: “He could not be found, because God had taken him away.” ... ⁷ By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family... ⁹ By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know

where he was going. ¹¹ And by faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she considered him faithful who had made the promise.

So Abel left a legacy of right-living - and God was pleased with his offering. Enoch was commended as one who pleased God – and therefore was swept up into heaven without dying. Noah and Abraham are both remembered for their obedience – and Sarah was given an extraordinary gift because of her faith in the God of Promise. These people, even though they are long gone, still inspire us today. Their stories of faith in action – their legacies – have lived on through the ages.

So that is what I want to talk about. How do **we** want to be remembered? What of **ourselves**, our **lives**, our **learnings** do we want to pass on to those who follow? And how do we do that?

When my kids were little, we made regular trips to see my parents. Inevitably, the kids would end up playing on the basement stairs – and though they were carpeted, my dad had a great fear of them falling and getting hurt. One day, after he had chased them off the stairs yet again, as my mom told me later, she had said to him, “You know, if you’re going to keep getting mad at them for that, then that is all they’ll remember about you.” When I heard this story, I asked my daughter, of course now grown, what she remembers about her grandfather. (She was 8 when he died). She said, “All I remember about Grandpa is that he was always getting mad at us when we played on the stairs”. So there you go!

My dad died in 1989, and as a contrast to the above story, I was glad to receive this email from a friend sometime later. He said, "I miss your Dad and still think of his gentle character from time to time. I had some great visits with him... He lived and died doing what he loved." So this friend's memory - and thankfully that of my **older** children, is much different from that of my daughter, who was the youngest. My eldest son, in fact, takes considerable pride in recognizing that he inherited his carpentry skills from his grandfather. To me this story is a reminder **to live in such a way that we will be remembered well; to be remembered in such a way that others, particularly our families, think about our lives, and smile.**

Each of you has gained at least some life experience. Hopefully you have come to a certain sense of peace about who you are. It may even be that you are becoming more comfortable with leaving some of the answers to your questions with God. You may have become more open-minded and gracious in dealing with others. Life and relationships may have taught you about the character of God – and over the years, you may have learned to sit more quietly in the **presence** of God. All of these learnings are yours to share.

One way we can do that is by writing a Legacy Letter, sometimes known as an Ethical Will. Legacy letters are an intentional way to share your values, blessings, life's lessons, hopes and dreams for the future; a way to share love, and forgiveness with your family, friends, and community. They are not new. In Genesis 49 we read the blessings and instructions that Jacob gives his sons. And in the New Testament, Jesus has parting words for his disciples.

Today, legacy letters are being written by people at turning points and transitions in their lives and when facing challenging life situations. They are often shared with family and community while the writer is still alive. They are like love letters to their families – and they may be one of the most cherished and meaningful gifts left to family and community.

What does a legacy letter include? It can include important personal values and beliefs, important spiritual values, hopes and blessings for future generations, life lessons, forgiving others and asking for forgiveness, and it can **also** include expressions of love.

My mom wrote her life story over a period of about 12 years, and we were able to compile that for her 90th birthday, about six months before she died. Each of her grandchildren have a copy, as do I. Yet, what is of **equal** importance to me is the **verbal** gratitude, affirmation and blessing she gave me just a week before she died. I will never forget it, and I strive each day to live up to her naming of my life's meaning.

You don't need to wait until the end of your life to write your faith story. It can be done in middle age and beyond. It might even be a good idea to start earlier than that! I know there are things I want **my** family to know, particularly about my **spiritual** journey - and it feels most appropriate to write them down, and in this way to pass on whatever wisdom, values, and beliefs I have gained in my life.

If you are wondering how to go about writing out your faith story, and how to pass on your legacy, there are several websites that give ideas to help

you get started. They suggest that over time, you might want to write down ideas - a few words or a sentence or two about things like:

- Your beliefs and opinions
- Things you did to act on your values
- Something you learned from grandparents / parents / siblings / spouse / children
- Something you learned from experience
- Something you are grateful for
- Your hopes for the future
- Write about important events in your life
- And if you can imagine that you only had a limited time left to live. What would you regret not having done?

When you have done that, you might want to move or even expand those sentences into paragraphs.

The **BIG** challenge, of course, to ensure that we are remembered in the way that we would want, is that we **live each day to the best of our ability**; that we ask the Spirit for the faith, obedience, and good-living of those who have guided us, as well as for wisdom gleaned from the lessons and experiences of our lives – and that these will be remembered and can serve as a guide for those who follow.

Prayer: O God, Giver of Life. We are grateful for the lives we have been given; for the lessons learned and the wisdom gained. Help us to see our lives through your eyes, knowing that in our imperfect humanness we are deeply loved. May the truth we seek shine through all we are and do – and help us, we pray, to live each day upheld by your grace. Amen.