

A Living Legacy

Sterling UMC
November 6, 2011
Philippians 3:1-11

How many of you can remember as you prepared to graduate from high school writing a last will and testament? I don't know how often that is done today, but it used to be a very important and widely practiced tradition in which you wrote about something you wanted to leave to those who would walk the hallowed halls of your school after you had moved on. I was going through some old high school yearbooks recently and ran across a few; the names have been changed to protect the innocent:

"I Joe Daniels, being of sound mind and body do hereby leave to Sam Smith my seat in Mrs. Miller's Latin class."

"I Emily Wells do hereby leave my sympathy to those who still have to remain for a few years."

"I Marcus Rich do leave numerous wads of chewing gum deposited on the bottom of desks for the enjoyment future students."

"I Billy Brown being of unsound mind and tired body do hereby leave."

Now on a more serious note, let me ask you how many of you have drawn up a legal last will and testament? Those of you who have no doubt have put a great deal of thought into that important document. You want to be sure that your estate is in order. You want to be sure that all the earthly belongs you have accumulated over the years are divided according to your wishes. You want to be sure your hard earned money goes to the persons or charities of your choice rather than to the state. In your will you no doubt make provisions for your home, your furniture, in other words all your worldly possessions. You decide how things will be divided between your heirs so that there is no confusion and conflict after you are gone. By doing this you are determining your legacy.

This morning, on this All Saints Sunday, I want to speak to you about your legacy. You see by definition the word legacy is anything handed down from the past as from an ancestor or predecessor. Obviously the first thing we think about when we hear this is all the material possessions that we have that when we are gone we will pass on to those who follow in our footsteps.

But my friends I believe there is a far more important legacy that each and ever one of us will leave to our descendants. It is a legacy not measured in dollars and cents, or in cars, or homes, or property. For these are things that do not last. It is a legacy of the heart. A legacy of the soul. A spiritual legacy. A living legacy.

I believe that each day you live you are writing your last will and testament. You are determining your legacy. By the way you live; by the things you say; by the things you do; by the attitudes you portray, you are handing down to those who come after you a piece of yourself. You are leaving a lasting mark in the hearts and minds of all you meet, and especially in the heart and minds of your children and your grandchildren. Proverbs 13:22 sums it up well. It says: "A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just." In other words the measure of one's character is not what he gets from his ancestors, but what he leaves

his descendants.

The apostle Paul speaks of such a legacy. In the text we heard a few moments ago Paul, near the end of his life is looking back and reflecting on what was truly important in his life. He is sharing his legacy with the Philippian church. Did you hear what he had to say?

He said that if anyone had the right to be proud of his credentials, he did. After all look at his upbringing, nationality, family background, inheritance, orthodoxy, activity, and morality. These were very impressive characteristics and accomplishments that he would leave to those who came after him. For some that would be a valuable legacy to leave to the next generation. But what does Paul say?

He goes on to say, "Whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord... I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him..." In other words, everything else was of secondary importance compared to his relationship with his Lord, Jesus Christ. That was the living legacy that he wanted to leave to those who followed him. And that should be the legacy that we as God's people strive to leave to those who come after us; not money, but faith; not titles, but devotion; not property, but dedication to person and cause of Jesus Christ.

Why would Paul say such a thing? Think about it. What legacy did Jesus leave with us? Even though he was the king of all creation, he did not choose the way of power and control. Even though he had the power to claim all of the wealth and riches in this world, he chose to walk this earth as a common carpenter. Jesus' legacy is not a legacy kingdoms and riches and material glories. For he knew those things were only temporary. He knew they do not last, they fade away. Rather He left a living legacy that will go on in the hearts and lives of his people forever. And what is that living legacy? We see it demonstrated right here in this holy Sacrament.

First it is a legacy of love. For you see it was love that led Christ to the cross. It was Christ's unfathomable, unconditional, unmerited love that caused his body to be broken and his blood to be shed so that all the world might have the opportunity to receive forgiveness, to know salvation, and to experience the fullness of the relationship that God desires with us. And it is a living legacy of love because that same love that is here today as we come to this altar and partake of these elements. His love is waiting to receive you just as you are, to pardon and cleanse you from all sin, and to transform you into the people he wants you to be.

And friends it is a legacy of life. You see what Christ's love has made possible for each one of us is life. Jesus said, "I have come that you may have life, and that more abundantly." This means that Jesus is the one who truly gives us life and enables us to live life to its fullest. This abundant life is meant for us as his people now as we walk this earth. We don't have to go around with a gloomy and downcast outlook, the presence of Jesus Christ gives us peace and joy. He is the one who makes us truly happy.

But this abundant life is also a future hope. This legacy of life is not made complete until we leave this world. Why, because Christ's legacy of life is made complete it the gift of eternal life that is given to all who call on the name of the Lord and place their faith and trust in him. Paul knew this. That is why he could say, "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his suffering, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection

from the dead.”

Today we remember and celebrate the lives of some of God's saints. We remember all those who have gone before us but especially those we have lost in this past year. We rejoice that they have finished their race and have received their inheritance of life eternal. These persons have left us with a legacy, a living legacy. But their legacy is not dollars and cents. It is a legacy of faithfulness and devotion passed on to us through their Godly lives.

And so I leave you with a question to ponder. What kind of legacy are you leaving? What kind of last will and testament are you writing? Will your legacy be measured only in dollars and cents, or will it be measured in terms of character? Will it be seen in what you have gained, or in what you have given? How will your life be remembered? Are seeking to follow after Jesus Christ? Are you building a legacy of love and life?

My friends today, as you come to this altar, as you get on your knees before your Lord, and as you graciously partake of Christ's living legacy, I pray that you will give some serious thought and prayer to that question. What will be my legacy? For it is never too early to begin afresh, and what is even better, it is never too late to start anew.