



FIRST (SCOTS) SERMON

“Living Beyond Our Expiration Date”

Scripture Lessons: *Deuteronomy 34:1-10; 2 Timothy 1:1-7*

***This sermon was preached by The Rev. Dr. L. Holton Siegling Jr.
on September 10, 2023, at First (Scots) Presbyterian Church
in Charleston, South Carolina.***

Deuteronomy 34:1-10

Moses Dies and Is Buried in the Land of Moab

34 Then Moses went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, which is opposite Jericho, and the LORD showed him the whole land: Gilead as far as Dan, ²all Naphtali, the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the Western Sea, ³the Negeb, and the Plain—that is, the valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees—as far as Zoar. ⁴The LORD said to him, “This is the land of which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, saying, ‘I will give it to your descendants.’ I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not cross over there.” ⁵Then Moses, the servant of the LORD, died there in the land of Moab, at the LORD’s command. ⁶He buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth-peor, but no one knows his burial place to this day. ⁷Moses was one hundred twenty years old when he died; his sight was unimpaired, and his vigor had not abated. ⁸The Israelites wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days; then the period of mourning for Moses was ended.

⁹Joshua son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom because Moses had laid his hands on him, and the Israelites obeyed him, doing as the LORD had commanded Moses.

¹⁰Never since has there arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face.

2 Timothy 1:1-7

The Coming of the Holy Spirit

Salutation

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, for the sake of the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus,

²To Timothy, my beloved child:

Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

Thanksgiving and Encouragement

³ I am grateful to God—whom I worship with a clear conscience, as my ancestors did—when I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. ⁴ Recalling your tears, I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy. ⁵ I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you. ⁶ For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands, ⁷ for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.

Living Beyond Our Expiration Date

In Percy B. Shelly's classic poem, "Ozymandias," a desert traveler comes upon a ruined statue of an ancient king – Ozymandias, and although the inscription on the pedestal reads: "Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!" ... there's nothing there.

Shelly puts it this way ...

"Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away."

No mighty works / no expansive empire ... nothing but a wilderness ... sand, as far as the eyes can see.

Indeed, whether we are young, footloose, and fancy free ... or be we slightly older and perhaps reflecting differently now about life and living, we have all come to learn a very basic fact of life – a truth, if you will ... and it is this.

There comes a time, for each of us, when the sun will set on our earthly life. Now, I know, I know ... Holton goes away on a renewing and refreshing sabbatical, and the first thing he talks about upon his return is death and dying (Wah, wah, wah)!

So let me quickly add to that first truth a second truth, because, without it, that first truth is really nothing more than a half-truth ... the second truth is this ...

When the time comes for this mortal body to finally and fully put on immortality and when this perishable body puts on imperishability – then / then – that historic and biblical affirmation will be fulfilled, "Where O death is your victory? Where O death is your sting?"

In other words, the end is not the worst. In fact, in many ways, the end is actually the first / the beginning / the dawn of a new life ... a life lived eternally with God.

And so it happens for all those who have heard the Gospel of repentance for the forgiveness of sins /

for those who have put their trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior ... To put it another way, there is an eternal life which endures well past our earthly expiration date, if you will.

Such are the wonderful and redemptive works of God, and they are mighty. They are steadfast. And they are eternal.

... But is there not something to be said of our works, our life, and our living?

Of course, as exemplary reformed Christians, we approach good works for what they are – a natural outcropping of a living faith. In other words, works don't create faith ... but they do accompany it – or, at least, they should.

James, the brother of Jesus, the one who wrote the book in the Bible that bears his name, went so far as to say that “faith without works is dead.”

What's more, the things that we do and say ... the things for which we stand ... there is a good chance that many of those works will be remembered at a funeral of a loved one that I reference from the poem entitled, “The Dash.” The basic point of the poem is that the proverbial dash – the one that exists between the date of our birth and the date of our death – that dash that is filled with the way we spend our time and our days – it is, in a word, our Legacy!

The implication being that we are actually “living our legacy” right now. That is our Rally Day theme – “Living our Legacy,” which is to suggest that we have the capacity to do things today, the impact of which will be felt tomorrow.

In our Old Testament lesson this morning, Moses, the great Lawgiver, the one who had led God's people from the time of the great Exodus from Egypt, and all throughout the 40 years of wilderness wanderings ... when it came time for God's people to enter into the Promised Land – are right there at the boundary ... Moses was not permitted to enter. God would not allow him to go, because Moses had disobeyed God at the waters of Marah and Meribah. But when we read in our Old Testament lesson from Deuteronomy that “Never since has there arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses, who the Lord knew face to face,” we realize that even though Moses did not physically go into that “good land – that land flowing with milk and honey” – he did go there spiritually. He went there as part of archives of the early church's experience. He went in the very consciousness of God's people.

During the first part of my recent sabbatical, I was blessed to travel with several members of my family to Germany, Switzerland, and France, thanks to the Lilly Grant that we received ... and while we were there, we visited some absolutely incredible sights.

Now, we tend to think of Charleston as being old and state the fact often – and we are old – from the

settlement of our city in 1670 to 1731 the charter of our church family ... this sanctuary, which dates back to 1814, makes us one of the five oldest church buildings in the city!!!!

Oh, we know something about history and endurance and legacies here in Charleston, but in comparison to much of Europe, we are actually quite young. The cathedral in Cologne, Germany, the tallest twin-spired church in the world stands at 515 feet – well double the height of our twin bell towers – and dates back to the 13th century! That’s 700 years! Yes, while we were in Europe, we saw any number of ancient cities and castles and cathedrals. We saw some lovely natural landmarks as well.

Through the city of Bern, Switzerland, there flows the river Aare ... and there is a path that goes along the river for what seems like miles. So what you do is walk upstream, as far as you want to go, and then you hop into the river and float back to the city. And if you haven’t floated in a glacier-fed river before, let me just tell you that it was painfully cold. Though after you get numb, it is exhilarating!

Some of my favorite sites though ... had to do with the great reformer, Martin Luther. Luther, you may recall, nailed his 95 theses for debate to the castle church door in Wittenberg, Germany, in the year 1517. I saw the door frame – it still exists to this day, though, of course, the original wooden door has long since been replaced. Talk about a person who lived beyond his expiration date!

Luther’s contributions, along with the contributions of many others, continue to have a profound impact on the world, and particularly Western Culture ... from the way we think about health to education and science and art and literature. The hymnology of the church ... the Reformation contributed to all of that ... and among its chief architects was Martin Luther!

The town of Wittenberg, along with other locations throughout Germany, bear the title “Lutherstadt.” Lutherstadt Wittenberg. Lutherstadt Eisenach. Lutherstadt is German for “Luther city” – and it is affiliated with places where Martin Luther visited or played an important role.

All that is to say, the fingerprints of Martin Luther’s life are extraordinary ... and they are enduring. They have endured precisely because of what he said and did ... He challenged the church-at-large to rediscover basic Biblical truths, and his translation of the Bible into German was a blessing to any number of ordinary citizens. His contributions to reformed theology are innumerable.

But interestingly enough, Luther’s life also teaches us that some things may be remembered about us that aren’t true. Luther once said, “The maid who sweeps her kitchen is doing the will of God just as much as the monk who prays – not because she may sing a Christian hymn as she sweeps but because God loves clean floors.” This is a great quote – the only problem ... history tells us that Martin Luther may not have said that.

Or take those other famous words that we attribute to Martin Luther ... the ones he spoke when he was defending the faith at the diet of worms, which doesn't have anything to do with eating worms. The diet of worms was an assembly, a church court, "Here I stand, I can do no other." Now while those words are certainly true to form and could have easily been spoken by Luther himself, they were probably added later.

Did you know that some of Luther's comments were remembered out of context? Some as leverage to condemn alleged witches. And while Luther would have been the farthest thing from a supporter of cults, I don't see anything in his life that suggests he would have approved of harm being brought upon a person due to baseless allegations.

All in all, Luther can be remembered for what he said and did and also for what he didn't say ... and some of what he said has been twisted and contorted to fit what others wanted him to say.

It just goes to show that "Living Our Legacy" is serious business – and some of it is out of our control. What is within our control is the extent to which the things that are important to us actually happen.

Being here today; making sure your children and loved ones are here. It doesn't get counted per se. We don't give awards. It's humbling, but most folks won't remember what was said in this morning's sermon come Wednesday, much less two months from now. It's rare that a pastor could have a sermon like "Come Before Winter" that people remember. Ah, I'll tell you this ... that is accomplished from being here in a kind of cumulative impact of having committed oneself to growing spiritually.

In this morning's New Testament lesson, notice how Paul assumed that the faith of Timothy's mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois – that their faith was alive and well, "and now," Paul says, "I am sure, lives in you?"

You see, Paul knew how faith works. He knew that growing up in a Christian home has an impact on those who are in it. Lois and Eunice may be long gone by now, we don't know ... but their legacy endured in a most powerful way ... in the faith of their child, Timothy.

We can talk about living our legacy in a variety of ways ... instilling our legacy in our children ... serving our legacy in the ways we use our power in service to the powerless ... giving our legacy ... those ways by which we plant trees, the shade of which someone else will enjoy. Indeed, our legacy is a cumulation of all those things by which we are currently known.

How are we living our legacy? What aspect of our life will go into the future by virtue of what people will remember about us? What is our legacy in terms of our impact upon others?

I can tell you what I don't want mine to be. I don't want my legacy to be my loyalty to Clemson

University, although Will, our second born, is currently a student there. I don't want my legacy to be the time I spent on my cell phone or a wonderfully busy schedule, but with nothing to show for it.

I want to be known as a man of God. Strong, yet tender. I want to be remembered as a faithful husband, a dutiful father. A minister of the Word and Sacrament.

I want the Fruits of the Spirit to have been evident in my life. But here's the catch. If the Fruits of the Spirit are to have been known in my life ... then I will need to have actually demonstrated the blessed measure of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, because at the end of the day, people will never remember the things that didn't happen.

Friends, if we don't think like that, if we don't think about our legacy, we should. Because even though we were not intended to live forever on this side of heaven ... the glory and the praise that we give to God and his kingdom it is bigger than all of us. It transcends space and time. It endures!

We have all heard the phrase, "All good things must come to an end." Some might say that they expire ... but not a child of God.

No! We live well beyond our earthly expiration date ... and we do so, because of God's grace ... also because of the legacy that we live!

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

*The above sermon has not been edited by the author; therefore, there may be discrepancies. When in doubt please refer to the audio version of the sermon on this website.