

## "The Gifts Left Behind"

II Kings 2:1-3, 9; II Corinthians 4:1-6

Highlands Presbyterian Church, Columbus

November 6, 2016 – 25<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost – Rev. Ronald Botts

*(A Meditation)*

Every person leaves behind some kind of legacy... good, bad, or a little of both. Our Old Testament passage today from II Kings provides us a helpful perspective to consider this. It gives us a glimpse of the legacy associated with the prophet Elijah. His life was apparently so spiritually rich that his disciple, Elisha, wanted what his mentor had and even more so.

In his last earthly day Elijah turns to the younger man and says, "Tell me what I may do for you before I am taken from you." Elisha answered, "If it be possible, please let me inherit a double share of your spirit."

No greater honor could have come to Elijah than someone valuing his life so much. Elisha not only wanted to be like him, but doubly so.

Which of us could receive a higher tribute than for another to find such value in our life? We might wonder if our having lived would make this kind of difference to others. What legacy will we leave behind?

I think of this whenever I read the obituaries in the newspaper. Usually they're very flowery and complimentary, and that's not surprising. On the other hand, I particularly like this one which ran in a rural weekly and was obviously written by a son. "Jim Hudson was mean as a snake and his passing won't be noticed by many, but he was my dad and I'm sure going to miss the old man." It's not eloquent, but we get the point. He made a difference in at least one life. He won't be forgotten.

I think of this whenever I walk through a cemetery. Every stone there represents a life spent upon this earth. I find myself wondering about what kind of persons these individuals were. Were they happy? Were they fulfilled? Would they have been people I could have been friends with if our lives could have crossed? Are they still remembered now by anyone?

A woman by the name of Nola Sorrells wrote a devotion in *The Upper Room* magazine some years back. In it she relates that she lost five relatives in one year to untimely deaths. She writes "I was feeling deep sorrow one morning... gazing out the kitchen window, pondering the short lives of our loved ones.

"Suddenly I was aware of how fortunate I was to have this day ahead of me. I wondered what each of our loved ones would do with just one more day to live. Then I decided I would live this day doing what they would have done.

"I began by baking chocolate chip cookies to welcome a new neighbor, as my mother-in-law would have done; I donated clothing to a needy organization, as my brother would have done; I phoned a friend I had lost touch with, as my sister-in-law would have done—all the while smiling as my grandchild would have.

“With God’s guidance, sorrow turned to joy as, mindful of others who aren’t here, I tried to help those who are.” So here we find a woman who was determined to let the good from those she missed live on in her. She found a way to turn the sadness she felt into the joy of carrying on her inheritance.

Turning now from Elijah in the Old Testament, there is a set of letters in the New that reveal another person of strong character. Their author, Paul, was so filled with the spirit of Christ that it changed his life forever. In a day when many were not reluctant to bask in their own self-importance—not all that different from today—he writes to one of his church communities: “For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake.”

Today we are still shaped in our faith by Paul’s testimony and words. His contribution is lasting. He is not forgotten. We continue to be influenced by this man of 2000 years ago. What then of the one who inspired him to say and do what he did? Jesus is the ultimate influence on us all.

The legacies of others have left a decided imprint upon our lives. They have made a difference in who we are and what we believe and how we live. They have shaped the men and women that we are today. We owe much to them, whether they are well known to many, or thought of today by only a small circle who carry on their influence.

And what of us? What legacy will **we** leave? What is the mark we’ll contribute to life? How will people remember us? One thing is certain: those who leave the most positive mark on life are those who live generously. They are people who give readily of their energy, their possessions, their time, and the fullness of themselves.

They don’t ask, “What is the least that I can get by with in life? What is the minimum I have to do?” Those who are most recalled are those who invested themselves liberally in others, who received God’s gifts and used them for the betterment of many, who took the time to build up meaningful relationships. Those most remembered are the ones who dared to live as if it might actually make a difference in the lives of others they came into contact with.

We live only one time. We leave only one legacy in life, one set of gifts. What that will be is largely our own determination. How you live today sets the direction for what will result tomorrow. What you value now, and how you show it, will probably be the difference as to whether you will be long remembered or quickly forgotten.

So, unfortunately, we don’t get to know that answer in our present time. We can’t foresee how we will be thought of down along life’s future road. That’s not the way it works, but I hope it can be said of you 10 years, 25 years, or even 50 years from today, that you made some lasting difference. Perhaps on some beautiful morning in the future, someone will stop, smile a bit, and offer up a brief prayer to heaven, thanking God for the continuing legacy that was your life and for the difference you made for others, and for the difference you still make in their life.