

## **THE LEGACY TABLE**

2 Timothy 1:3-7

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The non-religious holiday of Halloween, sometimes called All Hallows Eve, is connected to the religious holiday that comes after, known as All Saints Day.

Halloween has become big business in the United States. No longer just a fun day for children, adults are getting into the act with costumes, parties, elaborate yard decorations, and...how about this statistic? Americans spend \$350 million on Halloween costumes for their pets!

It's no wonder that All Saints Day is barely noticed.

My hope this morning is that this sermon encourages you to think about those people who have been saints for you, so that during this week, and during the upcoming holiday season when you gather around tables to celebrate and remember, you can give thanks for them, consider the legacy they have left you and also consider the legacy you want to leave behind.

When the Bible talks about saints, it is not talking about perfect people, or sinless people, or even especially powerful people. The saints of God are ordinary people who have an extraordinarily close relationship with God. They may not be exceptional people in many other ways, but they are exceptionally connected people.

I am willing to place a bet that there is at least one saint for every person in this room. Each of us can think of someone who helped bring us closer to God. I feel confident about that assertion because the Christian faith is a relational faith. There's an old

saying: “Faith is usually caught not taught”. It doesn’t mean that teaching and education are unimportant, only that the first spark of faith is usually not from a book but from a person. If you grew up going to church, you probably don’t remember many Sunday School lessons, but I’ll wager that you can remember a favorite Sunday School teacher. It’s unlikely you remember any specific sermons, but you may remember a pastor who had a personal impact on you. That spark can be kindled through education, through reading and study and discussions, through service and worship and even through those times that test us, but almost all of the time, the initial spark comes from one person to another.

You may have first received your faith from a parent or grandparent, the way Timothy did. Or maybe you received it from the person sitting beside you in church. Maybe your faith came from a spouse or a friend, who received their faith from a parent or grandparent. It’s how it works...the spark of faith is transmitted from one to another. Paul acknowledges the roots of Timothy’s faith. Timothy must have talked often about his mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois. And we see from our passage that there was deep affection between Timothy and Paul - they talked to one another about the things that mattered most, encouraging each other along the way. If you have someone in your life with whom you can talk about the things that matter most, if you have someone who encourages you to be your best self, that person can be added to your personal list of saints.

Why do we need saints? Why do we need heroes?

I’ve been thinking a lot about the state of our world, and about the sense of despair that seems all too close to the surface.

What does it mean to be a faithful person in a time when many news reports and conversations seem to end with, “Things are bad and getting worse”?

As faithful people, should we respond by anesthetizing ourselves so we won't feel the despair so keenly?

Should we decide there's nothing to do about the world's problems so we might as well enjoy ourselves? Bury ourselves in cocoons of shopping, Netflix, sports, entertainment, leisure, travel, whatever our favorite distraction might be?

Or is there another way to live? How do you begin to shape your legacy?

I encourage you to pay close attention to what and who is influencing you. Are you spending your time with people who are looking to be a part of the solution? Or people who just like to complain? Now everyone needs to vent sometimes. Lament is, after all, a part of the biblical vocabulary, but we don't wallow in lament. We express our anger, we let out our despair, but then we move on. What news sources influence you? What books? What music?

No one here believes that we can live healthy lives by eating junk food all day every day. We pay attention to what we put into our bodies. Do we pay attention to what we allow in to our minds, our hearts, our eyes and ears, our souls? These times call for living intentionally. Don't be casual or cavalier about the messages you are ingesting. We are what we eat. We are what we listen to. We are what we read. We are molded and shaped by the people with whom we spend our time.

The media are blamed a lot these days - they're blamed of bias, they're blamed for focusing on the negative. But the truth is - there's a lot of media to choose from and no one is forcing any particular channel or newspaper on us. I encourage you to think about what you are choosing and what influences those choices are having on your spirit.

For example, CNN has a feature every week called “CNN Heroes.” Each week they tell the story of an ordinary person who has done something extraordinary.

This week’s hero is Max Levitt, a young man who majored in sports management in college and whose first internship was as equipment manager for his college football team. At the end of the year he was told to throw out all of the used equipment to make room for the new. He couldn't believe that he was supposed to throw away so much that still could have been used, so he started an organization called Leveling the Playing Field, which he describes as a food bank for sports equipment. Now he runs the organization full-time and sees to it that youth in low-income schools have all the sports equipment they need. It’s a little ripple in the water, isn’t it, but I’d call Max Levitt if not a saint, at least a hero. It’s those ripples that all work together to make the world a better place.

Another CNN hero has a similar story. Rebecca Constantino became aware of libraries throwing away good and new books and she has since made sure that 1.5 million books have gone to needy schools and libraries in California.

Check out CNN heroes if you want to see how one person can make a difference.

And watch the episodes with your children if you want to see them inspired instead of despairing.

In the New York Times a few weeks ago, there was an editorial entitled, “Where Have All Our Heroes Gone?” There used to be a time, this writer remembered, when ticker-tape parades were held for such figures as Amelia Earhart, John Glenn, and all the crew members of the space shuttle Discovery. Or military figures like Dwight Eisenhower and Douglas MacArthur. Now? The only ticker-tape parades are for sports teams.

Why not a parade for Malala Yousafzai, the young Pakistani woman, shot by the Taliban for believing that girls deserve an education, who continues to work for human rights.

What about Sully, the pilot who saved 155 lives by landing safely on the Hudson River after a geese strike disabled his plane?

Or the Dalai Lama, a symbol of religious and political self-determination.

Soldiers from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, and Katherine Johnson, the “human computer” for NASA, featured in the movie “Hidden Figures,” whose calculations confirmed John Glenn’s flight path and made those two parades of his possible.

Why aren’t we lifting up those who are making a positive difference in the world? It’s not just up to the media. It’s also up to us to find the stories and celebrate them.

Last week while Doug and I were traveling I read a book called The Choice, written by Dr. Edith Eger. She was born in Hungary and was sent to Auschwitz and other camps when she was a teenager. When the American soldiers liberated her camp, she looked so much like a corpse she was almost left for dead. But dead she wasn’t. She eventually married, immigrated to the United States, had children and became a psychologist. This year, at the age of 93, she wrote a book about her life and her work. Her life purpose is to teach people what she learned at Auschwitz: that we have much more power within our minds than we ever imagine, the power to shape our responses and thus our reality. You may have heard this advice before, but it means something different coming from a Holocaust survivor when she writes, “Each moment is a choice. We cannot choose what happens to us but we can always always choose how we will respond.”

It is the choices we make that determine our character and the quality of our lives. We can move closer towards heroism when we are intentional about our choices. I want to read you a paragraph from the foreword of the book that inspired me:

“Heroism is a mind-set or an accumulation of our personal and social habits. It is a way of being. And it is a special way of viewing ourselves. To be a hero requires taking effective action at crucial junctures in our lives, to make an active attempt to address injustice or create positive change in the world. To be a hero requires great moral courage. And each of us has an inner hero waiting to be expressed. We are all ‘heroes in training.’ Our hero training is life, the daily circumstances that invite us to practice the habits of heroism: to commit daily deeds of kindness; to radiate compassion, starting with self-compassion; to bring out the best in others and ourselves; to sustain love, even in our most challenging relationships; to celebrate and exercise the power of our mental freedom.”

If a hero is someone who is working towards addressing injustice and creating positive change in the world, someone who radiates compassion and love, then heroes are pretty close to saints, aren't they?

Who are your heroes? Where are your saints? Are you reading their lives? Studying the choices they made? Soaking up every possible lesson? Are you sitting at the dinner table with your children and grandchildren and talking about the people in the world who are throwing pebbles of goodness into the water?

And what kind of legacy are you leaving to those who will sit at the table after you're gone? What stories are you telling? What examples are you showing? What will those who come after us learn from the choices we make? The jokes we tell? The people with

whom we surround ourselves? The way we treat not just our friends but everyone? The way we spend our time and the way we spend our money?

Some saints are those who have suffered greatly – and some who suffer still, even in our midst – and yet praise God all the more. Some saints are those who have known the pain of grief and the sting of death, and still manage to find a way to sing, “Alleluia!” Some saints are those who have been excluded and ignored by every corner of society and yet still find ways to seek and serve Christ, loving their neighbor as themselves.

And so when we celebrate all saints, we commemorate those worshipping in our pews who are suffering silently. We work to include those in our community who love God and neighbor, and yet find themselves on the margins. And we remember those whose worship of God is unceasing, even now that they have passed into light everlasting.