

“THE SANCTITY OF OLD AGE, GROWING OLD TO THE GLORY OF GOD.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Scripture Texts: Psalm 71, 90, 92; Isaiah 46:4; II Corinthians 4:16-18

Prayer: Father, we come in weakness to receive your superior strength. We come in ignorance to receive your superior wisdom. We come in need to receive your all-sufficient help. Open our hearts to your Word, the treasure above all treasures. For the sake of Jesus, Amen.

Introduction.

Today is called Sanctity of Human Life Sunday. In fact, it was 50 years ago today that the fateful Roe v. Wade decision was handed down by the Supreme Court making abortion legal in the US. That decision was overturned last summer, but we know it is now a state by state decision and still very accessible. And even more so with the increased use of abortion pills.

I have often preached on the issue on this Sunday, on how precious and significant and valuable life is, how babies are created in the image of God. This morning I want to focus on the other end of the continuum of life, on how every elderly person is still the image of God and is significant, valuable, to be honored and protected.

Scripture repeatedly calls us to honor old age and the aged, I want us to do that this morning.

You are useful. We need you.

You may feel like the world says you aren't useful or important any more, you are being passed by. You may even think you aren't useful anymore, you can't do all those things you once did. You may feel like the Psalmist that you are cast off, now that your strength is spent.

Paul once told a young pastor, don't let anyone look down on you because of your youth. Good words. But it could also be said, don't let anyone look down you because of your age. Or perhaps more to the point, don't you look down on yourself because of your age. Don't say you are not important, don't say you aren't useful anymore, don't say the church is for the younger people. None of that is true.

Let me counter all those lies from the devil and say you are most important and useful.

First, we need your prayers. I need your prayers. Pray for your church, pray for our worship, for our leaders, for families, children. Pray like Simeon and Anna in the temple. God has given you long years to pray and He hears your prayers and honors your prayers.

Second, we need your wisdom, your practical experience, your maturity.

Job 12:12 Wisdom is with the aged, and understanding in length of days.

We need your reminder to keep the main thing the main thing, to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, to keep our focus on heaven, on the joy that is set before us, that the best is yet to come.

We need your example of faithfulness, your example of devotion and loyalty to the Lord, your example of steadiness through the trials of life.

Third, we need your encouragement, your faith in God. We need you to say to us, God is faithful, He has been from my youth, and He will be in your youth. Like the Psalmist, we need your proclaiming faith and trust and hope from one generation to the next. As we sang, remind us “Our God is good, and His hand is strong.”

Fourth, we need your presence. Yes, your presence is important. We know the extra effort it takes to get here on Sunday mornings.

Do you realize how much this church values your presence? We have invested in an elevator, a bus, a ramp, sound system, a hearing aid loop, all of which say your presence is important to us.

There is something beautiful when generations of saints gather for worship. This is meant to be a taste of heaven, a picture of all ages gathered to worship and proclaim God’s goodness and faithfulness.

There are times when circumstances require you to stay home and watch, but please never stay home because you think no one will care or miss you. You matter, you are important, your presence among us is important to God and to us.

With that said let me offer some encouragement for how to live out your senior years.

Don’t live them in fear, live them by faith.

Don’t fear losing your memory, God never forgets His own. Aging and all that it brings will not alter the essence of who we are and what life is truly about. “Your life is hidden with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:3). “To live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21).

God’s light shines in the darkness, and the darkness cannot overcome it. God’s grace, goodness and faithfulness are unfailing, even when ours is.

Don’t fear losing your independence. The truth is there has never been a day in any of our lives when we have not been dependent on God and others. Apart from Him we have nothing.

Don’t fear becoming a burden to others, we are all of us a burden to others at different times and in different ways all through life. Certainly our young children were dependent on us and

we didn't resent them for it. From birth to death, no one is ever truly independent. All of us need each other, more at some times than at others. Do not fear asking for and accepting help.

Think of life as interdependence, the younger generation needs us as we also need them. When someone has to serve us and help us, it is humbling for us and for them, and humility is good. Our dependency can be an occasion of grace both for ourselves and for others.

Now let's turn our attention to living out our senior years in faith, by faith, with faith.

Determine by God's grace and help to grow older gracefully, graciously, to finish well.

Isaiah 46 is an important help in this.

Isaiah 46:4 Even to your old age I am he, and to gray hairs I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save.

Hear what God is saying. I have made you, I have birthed you and borne you, I have carried you and saved you. Even to your old age I am your God and continue to carry you. This is a grand statement about God's constant and continual providence in your life. Everything in your life has been sustained by His grace.

So as you grow older, don't grumble and complain, don't murmur and gripe, don't wish for something different, don't think God has failed you or let you down. Accept all things as from His hand and receive them with gratitude and learn to be content with all God's providence.

Life changes, you change, your body and circumstances change, but the God who has carried you has not changed, He is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. In all your trials, trouble, afflictions, determine to be grace filled, gracious, grateful. Finish well.

Life is a gift from God and old age is a gift from God. God's grace is sufficient.

We are inclined to think of growing old as a season of loss, loss of abilities, loss of faculties, loss of freedoms. But the Bible thinks differently. As Psalm 92 says while there may be physical or material losses, there is spiritual gains, increases, ripeness, fruitfulness. We find ourselves drawing nearer to God and knowing God more.

Grow old more aware of God and all His grace and His promises.

One of the things we do in our declining years is think back over all the years. We think of regrets and of all the sins we have committed, duties neglected, time wasted, and opportunities lost.

These kinds of thoughts can bring great suffering and anguish of soul, tears of sorrow, grief, depression. But these tears and feelings don't atone for our past sin. Only the blood of Jesus

can do that. Don't give in to unprofitable remorse and regret and sorrow. Don't stay there. Let those thoughts lead you quickly to our only hope and help, Jesus Christ.

There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Flee to Him when the lies of Satan come to crush your soul.

Finish well, but know that it is God who promises to finish us well and bring us to completion.

Philippians 1:6 I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

Determine by God's grace and help to use your retirement for His glory.

Psalms 92:12-15 The righteous flourish like the palm tree and grow like a cedar in Lebanon.
13 They are planted in the house of the Lord; they flourish in the courts of our God.
14 They still bear fruit in old age; they are ever full of sap and green,
15 to declare that the Lord is upright; he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him.

Notice why they bear fruit in old age. They are planted in the house of the Lord, in the courts of God. In other words, they are planted in the presence of God and in the things of God. They are planted in the Word of God, in the means of grace we have from God, worship, prayer, sacraments, fellowship of the saints.

The sap of life comes from the Word and Spirit by the grace of God as we abide in Christ, the vine. Continue to use your God given gifts for His glory, honor Him with your lives as long as you can.

We are created to do good works. Those good works change over time and as we get older. But there are good works to be done until the very end. Continue in good works. Continue to love and serve and be useful in service to God and man.

Don't fall into the false notion that great achievements are more pleasing to God than quiet, humble service, even the prayers of the saints. Remember God was in the still small voice. Remember God said be still and know I am God.

We can always pray and worship and glorify God, expressing gratitude and thanksgiving. Remember Simeon and Anna praying for the Church and staying involved in Church. We think work and effort are more valuable than prayer. Let me remind you.

Zechariah 4:6 Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts.

Don't retire from the Christian life and Christian growth.
Don't turn off your heart or your brain.
Keep reading, praying, listening, talking about the things of God.

Flourish like the palm tree, grow like the cedar, flourish in the courts of the Lord.

We can still worship and that is the best work.

We can still pray and that is the greatest work.

We can still speak wisdom and give a testimony concerning Jesus and that is holy work.

Pray Colossians 1:9-14 for you and your church.

Determine by God's grace and help to consciously prepare for heaven.

II Corinthians 4:16-18 So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. 17 For this light momentary affliction is *preparing* for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, 18 as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen.

Heaven is a prepared place for prepared people. You prepare for a long trip, you prepare to downsize and move. Intentionally prepare and plan to depart this life.

Remember the parable of the five virgins wisely preparing for the coming of the Bridegroom.

Colossians 3:1-2 If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.

Pursue holiness and righteousness, Christ-likeness, meditate on heaven.

Matthew 6:33 Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

A word to the younger generation.

Honor those who are older. Why should we honor them? Because God says we should.

Leviticus 19:32 You shall stand up before the gray head and honor the face of an old man, and you shall fear your God: I am the Lord.

Why should we honor them? Simply because they are older or old. They have borne the image of God along time. God has honored them, so should we.

Honor the old face, honor the wrinkled hands, honor the one who walks with a limp, honor the one who drives five miles an hour under the speed limit, honor the person who is slow in the checkout lane, honor the person who repeats himself.

Don't look down on them, don't despise them, don't be impatient with them, don't push them aside. One day very soon we will all be that person.

Seek their wisdom, counsel, advice. Ask them for their opinion and ask for their prayers. Look at gray hair as a crown of glory, an achievement to be celebrated. Listen to him, learn from his experience, imitate his faith and faithfulness. Ask God to be with you in your old age as He is with him. Remember it was not that long ago he was as young as you are, full of vim and vigor.

Implications and application.

The sanctity of human life has no age limit. From conception to death we are all created by God and created in His image, to bring Him glory. Our life is a gift from God to be used for God all the days of our lives.

Isaiah 43:1-3 Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,
and the flame shall not consume you.

For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.

Prayer: Holy, Sovereign and good God, we acknowledge you as our creator and maker and you have every right to do with us and our bodies as you please and that will be most to your glory.

Father of all compassion, do not cast us off in the time of old age or forsake us when our strength is gone. By your sufficient grace enable us to continue to bear fruit that glorifies you to the end of our days. Deliver us from despair or depression or dementia; grant us to bear our declining years with patience, peace and complete submission to your will, whatever that will may be.

May we always rejoice in our salvation and look forward to the hope of glory and long for the appearing of our Savior and Lord Jesus Christ. Prepare us in every way for our day. Remove any fear and if it would please you grant us an easy passage from this world to the next. While we journey in this valley of the shadow of death, remove all fear of evil or the evil one.

Enable us to leave a testimony to the very end, pointing always to the worth and faithfulness of Jesus. Let us leave an example for others to follow.

One thing we ask, that we may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of our life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple (Ps. 27:4), in Jesus name, Amen.