

Text: Joshua 4:1-3 and 19-24

April 20, 2008

Theme: It's possible to leave an inheritance for others. But if we want to create a legacy, we have to leave something in others: something to remember, something to inspire, something that will increase the ministry of Jesus.

Title: ***Generation to Generation***

If you're our guest today, you can tell you've joined us in a special time of opportunity as our church approaches the purchase of some land for ministry expansion out Richmond Road as a dual location with our home base here. Thanks for your patience as we talk about that.

And many thanks to you, Centenary, for the wonderful way you're going about this discussion. I'm so grateful for the conversation we're having and the respect and unity we're sharing with one another.

We're learning from each another, being honest and open without guilt or edginess over variations in our perspectives or ideas.

This is being a family, trying to live out the purposes of the church, God's plan for reaching into the world with the love of Jesus Christ. And we're talking about The Land as an opportunity for expanding that.

Two weeks ago, our conversation had input from the book of Joshua with Israel camped at the Jordan River with land in view.

Today we pick back up with God's people crossing the river into the promise, and we're going to try to learn from the first things they did inside.

So let's read together from Joshua 4.

READ Joshua 4:1-3 and 19-24

A young shoe-shop assistant and Sunday School teacher in Chicago named Edward Kimball had a heart for kids. He spent hours of his free time reaching out to boys in Chicago's inner city, trying to win them to Christ.

Through Edward Kimball, a kid named Dwight Moody became a Christian in 1858. Moody grew up to be a preacher.

In 1879, Dwight Moody was instrumental in the conversion of a young man named F. B. Meyer, who also grew up to become a minister.

Meyer in turn led a young man named J. W. Chapman to Christ, who himself became a pastor God used to bring the message of Jesus to a baseball player named Billy Sunday.

As an athlete/evangelist, Sunday once held a revival in Charlotte, North Carolina, that continued so long that he invited another evangelist to join him by the name of Mordecai Ham.

And it was while Ham was preaching there in Charlotte that a teenager named Billy Graham gave his life to Jesus—through whom, as you know, God has reached hundreds of millions with the message of new life in Christ all over the earth.

It happened across generations, and it all started with Edward Kimball's choice to sacrifice his time for some street kids.

When you put today in the context of the generations, our choices matter more than we

think. Our decisions and actions can bless people for many ages to come. That's a very people-of-God kind of orientation to life, to live it with the generations in mind: standing in the present with honor for the past and greater hope for the future.

God is this way. "Say to the Israelites," God says to Moses standing in the present at the burning bush there at the top of your sermon notes, "[say that] 'the Lord, the God of your fathers'—honor for the past—"the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.' This my name forever, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation"—greater hope for the future, which is the theme for these weeks of worship: from generation to generation. (Exodus 3:15)

Because that's really what this moment is about as our church family affirms a decision to complete the purchase of land: standing in this crucial moment with respect for our past and casting forward even greater hope for our future of ministry expansion.

It's for the generations, for those who will follow after us. And with that kind of frame around it, these choices do matter more than we think.

Generations matter to us. My uncle was a part of that all-expense-paid trip to Washington, D. C., provided by the Veterans Administration for every living World War II veteran to see the World War II memorial after it opened.

Our capitol cities are chock full of the things we believe matter to the generations. We pay close attention to effects of heredity in alcoholism and diabetes and heart disease. "The apple doesn't fall far from the tree" and "chip off the old block" and "like father, like son" are phrases no one needs to explain to us.

I remember staying in a Bed and Breakfast in Scotland with a family who had a chart framed on their wall directly tracking their family line back to the 1300s.

Boston College researchers predict that \$41 trillion will be passed down to younger generations in our country over the next half century.

Generations matter to us. Generations matter in the Bible. Human sin is inherited from Adam and Eve, we believe. Everything anticipated about the messiah centers on restoring the dynasty of kings descended from David. The New Testament opens tracing forty-two generations in the ancestry of Jesus.

Generations matter—to God, who promises in the Ten Commandments to punish sin to the third and fourth, but to show love "to a thousand generations of those who love and keep my commandments." (Exodus 20:5-6)

The people of God live in generational communion, standing in the present with honor for the past and greater hope for the future, making our choices with generations in mind.

Which explains why Joshua did what he did upon crossing into the land of promise. What do you do when you get there—you arrive at your parents' house, you reach your get-away destination, you come home after a long trip? What's the first thing you do?

The Hebrews had been wandering for forty years and they had just now pulled in to Canaan. And you'd think they would want to explore or take a nap or celebrate or have a bath or romp around or eat or just settle in.

But the first thing God required was an action taken in with generations in mind. Twelve men, each representing one of Jacob's children, were to hoist a big rock on their shoulders, found on the bottom of the river bed, and carry it to shore for building a small monument, a mound of stones that the children could ask about. The first thing to do when you get there, God said to Joshua: take action for the generations to come. Something most people wouldn't do by instinct. Generations matter, but we tend to live for the now. Delayed gratification is not so much in vogue today. We want it all, and we want it today. Maybe that's why there is such little long-term thinking. A generational perspective is very unselfish.

But this pile of stones was job #1 in the land of God's promise so that the next generation would want to know the story behind it: "Joshua set up at Gilgal the twelve stones they had taken out of the Jordan. He said to the Israelites, 'In the future when your descendants ask their fathers, 'What do these stones mean?' tell them, 'Israel crossed the Jordan on dry ground.'" (Joshua 4:19-22)

What do these stones mean? What do our actions represent? What does The Land we're talking about mean to our kids?

Three things that Joshua helps us to see.

First, this moment represents a story we can remember. We're making crucial memories for the generations right now.

Israel always had trouble remembering. It was their Achilles heel, the need every prophet called out for, the reason for this mound of stones. And the same risk exists today.

Each new generation creates a break, a gap where the baton can fail to pass.

With the Olympic torch now moving toward Beijing, we can remember the 2004 American women's 4X100 relay team that was favored to win the gold medal in Athens, featuring Marion Jones, a sprinter who had won four golds at the previous games in Sydney.

The American team was off to a strong start when Jones took the baton for the second leg of the race, gaining ground in her 100 meter leg as she approached Lauryn Williams who would run the third.

Williams began running as Jones drew near, but when she reached back to receive the baton, she couldn't complete the handoff. One time, two times, and third time Jones thrust the baton forward, and each time it missed Williams' hand.

On the fourth try, they made the connection, but this was after they had crossed out of the 20-yard exchange zone. The team was disqualified.

Everyone knew they were the fastest on the track. But they couldn't close the gap. The baton failed to pass. And the race was over.

We can run so fast in this life that we fail to remember what our kids need to know—and the baton fails to pass. We need things to build reminder bridges across the generation gaps, mounds of river rocks that cause the kids to ask.

Like a stop you could make with your children right outside the elevator on the second floor where there are plaques commemorating three women: Carlene Holbrook who taught Sunday School here for over forty years. Alma

Schlientz who played the piano for the children until she was over 90.
And Lois Cooper who taught children here for nearly 30 years.
I'll never forget Lois' funeral. This whole sanctuary was full to honor a quiet woman who made an eternal impact in the lives of generations here—an example always worth remembering.

We have these mounds of river rocks scattered all around: plaques on some of your pews, engraved bricks on the back of The Chapel.
And that's what this land can be: a mound of reminders to our children of the story that it was a miracle that we found it. It was a miracle that we were able to hold on to The Land. It will be a miracle that we are able to buy it. That's our generous God. "And now, kids, the next miracle will be yours."

Which is the second thing Joshua 4 helps us see in this moment: the way it can inspire and call forth the best from future generations.

To young leaders, our next generation, The Land says, "We're confident in you. We're doing something brave and generous in our day because we have high hopes for you, great expectations for the future in your hands. We believe you can handle this, in God's strength."

The Land plants in the heart of our next generations a holy restlessness that there is more, that we can stretch, the gift of something to our future that will make sure we never become satisfied and apathetic.

We do this so that others can remember and can be inspired but, above all, so that Jesus can be known.

That mound of river rocks declared that God had done this "so that all the peoples of the earth might know that the hand of the Lord is powerful..." (Joshua 4:24)

"All the peoples of the earth": we act for the expansion of ministry with land so that all of Lexington, all of Kentucky, all people as far as God's grace will take us will know of Jesus. People need Jesus Christ. That's why we exist. That's why we long to expand.

Ultimately, that's the only purpose worthy of our sacrifice: that Jesus can be known. That wide-open opportunity and calling would be the greatest gift to the generations.

So let's put this age-to-age perspective into practical terms. What does it mean in daily life that we are here today worshiping a God who shows love to a thousand generations?

On September 2, 1945, the documents of surrender officially ending World War II were signed by the Japanese aboard the USS Missouri with General Douglas MacArthur being the last to sign on behalf of the United States.

MacArthur, surrounded by his military colleagues, took his fountain pen and simply signed his first name: "Douglas." He then passed the pen to General Wainwright, who signed "Mac." MacArthur then handed the pen to General Percival, who signed "Arthur."

It was unusual, but this was General MacArthur's way of rewarding two US generals who had suffered persecution as prisoners of war. They had persevered, and now they shared in the glory of victory.

At Romans 8:17, Paul describes the future of those who persevere against the battles we fight, that one day we will be joint-heirs with Christ.

We are joint-heirs, joint descendants with Christ. That means that the difficulties we may have inherited in our emotional DNA, our mental or relational or physical or spiritual inheritance is not the whole story. It's only part of what we share jointly with Jesus Christ.

We've been written into the will of His inheritance of resurrection life. Our spiritual heredity is altered in Christ who has "redeemed [you] from the empty way of life handed down to you," I Peter says.

This is something deserving of follow up conversation, and you let us know if you'd like to talk about it. But no child of God is bound by generational fate.

You may have inherited some weakness. But those who follow you could inherit God's favor and wholeness.

Cycles can be broken and replaced by God's blessing through Jesus Christ, ministry we pray God will increase.

All of which involves, second, our learning to live and give with a generational worldview. We do what we do now believing that it will produce an increase in the generations to come.

When I first got out of seminary, I helped some people in Cave City, where I first served as a pastor, to team up in starting a ministry with the poor in our area.

It was hard to get started. We poured ourselves into it. We helped a few people. But I happened to run into some old friends who told me that that ministry now has two paid staff and helps about 250 families a month.

That's the compounding blessing from Edward Kimball to Billy Graham, the double portion Elisha asked from Elijah, the expansion of ministry we believe God is leading us to have with The Land.

We know that translates into sacrifice in our day so that future generations will increase. But that's just basic parenting. The heart of any loving mom or dad is to do whatever it takes so that our children have a better life than we've had.

That's the sacrifice our church is called to in our day for the increase God wants and our world needs in the days ahead. It's not easy. When he was asked for that double portion of blessing, Elijah said to Elisha, "You have asked a difficult thing." (II Kings 2:9-10)

It's a challenge. It's unselfish. But living and giving sacrificially with the generations in view is possible because that's exactly how God looks at it.

Not limited by time, Scripture teaches that God is working to fulfill the hopes of the past today in us, which means we can be daring today with great dreams for the future.

After recounting the sacrifice of great heroes of faith, Hebrews 11 says, "These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect."

So something of Joshua's courage is still getting worked out together with us. That means we can entrust our fulfillment to those who will follow after.

Peter stood up at Pentecost and said that the Holy Spirit had been poured out in fulfillment of God's promise "for you and your children and for all who are far off..." (Acts 2:39)

That's the church we would buy this land for: for a Centenary not yet born, "for a future

generation,” Psalm 102 says, “that a people not yet created may praise the Lord.” (102:18)

We sow our lives as seeds into these Kingdom fields because Jesus has promised they will grow through the generations until they produce a harvest of righteousness to be reaped “at the end of the age”—Matthew 13:39.

It’s possible to leave an inheritance for others. But if we want to create a legacy, we have to leave something in others: something to remember, something to inspire, something that will increase the ministry of Jesus—which would be the greatest gift from generation to generation.

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