

Making Life Count

Philippians 2:12-13, I Corinthians 15:50-58

It is with the saddest heart that I must pass on the following news: Please join me in remembering a great icon of the entertainment community. The Pillsbury Doughboy died yesterday of a yeast infection and complications from repeated pokes in the belly. He was 71. Doughboy was buried in a lightly greased coffin. Dozens of celebrities turned out to pay their respects, including Mrs. Butterworth, Hungry Jack, the California Raisins, Betty Crocker, the Hostess Twinkies and Captain Crunch. The grave site was piled high with flours.

Aunt Jemima delivered the eulogy and lovingly described Doughboy as a man who never knew how much he was kneaded. Doughboy rose quickly in show business, but his later life was filled with turnovers. He was not considered a very smart cookie, wasting much of his dough on half-baked schemes. Despite being a little flaky at times, he still, as a crusty old man, was considered a roll model for millions.

Doughboy is survived by his wife, Play Dough; two children John Dough and Jane Dough; plus they had one in the oven. He is also survived by his elderly father Pop Tart. The funeral was held at 3:50 for about 20 minutes.

Well, that's probably one of the funniest obituaries you'll ever read, but generally obituaries are not humorous, but I was wondering, not to be morbid, but have you ever thought about your obituary. What would be written, or what kind of eulogy someone would read after your passing?

I guess I was thinking about that a few weeks ago when Pastor Hey Young shared the needlepoint piece entitled Living that had these words: "We do not know how long we have Till time for us is past, so let us live as if this day is going to be our last. Of course one thought that came to my mind was with that philosophy, I might not care about what I eat and just indulge in whatever junk food I wanted. You know eat all the donuts and ice cream that you want to. But I guess with that way of thinking it might just be my last.

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A couple weeks ago I spoke about Destiny and I suppose most of us would like to be free to choose our own destiny, make our own plans, and generally live as we please. Certainly that is a common approach to life that our culture has planted in our brains. And up against that approach we are reminded that God has created us for a greater purpose. That part of our faith experience and the living of our lives as a follower of Jesus is the recognition that each of us is called to be good stewards in how we live. That we are invited and challenged to live as a faithful steward of our time and our resources.

It seems to be that is what the apostle Paul is getting at when he gives this admonition: Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. That part of my understanding of what faith is all about is the actual living out of my faith. Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. But wait a minute. I thought salvation was about grace, and simply trusting in what Christ has done for me by faith. Wasn't it Paul who also said that we are saved by grace through faith. That's what he told the Ephesian church. You remember that passage: our salvation is a gift from God, but the passage also goes on to say: "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works." We are saved by faith...but that salvation is a life-long journey of seeking to follow in the way Christ calls us to live. Following Jesus is a part of who we are everyday.

So you and I are invited to see our faith in Jesus Christ as a journey of discipleship. And to realize that discipleship is about stewardship. That I could say in my heart. I want my faith to make a difference, not just for me personally, but to make a difference in the world. That our life would count, would have an impact for good, that we would truly be good stewards of the life God has given us.

There's no doubt that will take on different forms, partly based on the particular gifts God has given you. And so each of us must prayerfully seek how to best utilize those gifts. Like Paul Barnett shared last week, we have many gifts, but we are one body. Those gifts may be demonstrated in how we teach or mentor someone, or how we speak up for someone, or how we care for someone needing a helping hand. How we witness to our faith by our words and our actions. There are so many

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ways we have the opportunity to make a difference in this world. It is working out our salvation with fear and trembling.

I was thinking about the lesson Jesus taught when he gave the parable of the talents. The person given five talents, and two talents and one talent. And how the first two wisely used those talents while the one with the one talent was judged because he did not invest his talent. It is in that passage that we sometimes hear these words quoted at someone's memorial service: "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!" As followers of Jesus, aren't they the words we hope to hear when we come to the end of life's journey: "Well done, good and faithful servant."

You know, there are a number of passages that are often read in the context of a funeral or memorial service. One of those come from what is known as the Resurrection chapter of the Bible: I Corinthians 15. I have used it many times, especially at the graveside. After speaking about how this perishable body must put on the imperishable and this mortal body, must put on immortality...he exclaims: "Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." And then this powerful conclusion and statement of exhortation: "Therefore, my beloved brothers and sisters, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain."

In the Lord your labor is not in vain...those things that really count, that make a difference in someone's life, that have an impact, that have spiritual value and even eternal significance. And it doesn't matter what our age is. We can be a child, a young person, an older person. We all have this opportunity to make our life count, by our witness, by our acts of compassion, by our serving one another.

Most of us have seen or heard the poem: The Dash. But since it seems to be such an appropriate statement to what I have been speaking about I would like to read it this morning:

The Dash - by Linda Ellis

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“I read of a man who stood to speak at the funeral of a friend. He referred to the dates on her casket from beginning to the end. He noted that first came the date of her birth and spoke of the following date with tears, but he said what mattered most of all was the dash between those years. For that dash represents all the time that she spent alive on earth and now only those who loved her know what that little line is worth. For it matters not, how much we own, the cars, the house, the cash, What matters is how we live and love and how we spend our dash. So think about this long and hard; Are there things you would like to change?
For you never know how much time is left that can still be rearranged. If we could just slow down enough to consider what is true and real and always try to understand the way other people feel. And be less quick to anger and show appreciation more and love the people in our lives like we have never loved before. If we treat each other with respect and more often wear a smile, Remembering that this special dash might only last a little while. So when your eulogy is being read with your life’s actions to rehash... Would you be proud of the things they say about how you spent your dash?”

All of us are called to live out our dash as disciples of the Lord Jesus. To work out our salvation with fear and trembling. To make our lives really count. That it could be said of each of us: “Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of the Lord.”