

“Take Hold of the Life That is Truly Life”

I Kings 8:22-30; I Timothy 6:6-19; Matthew 21:12-16

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From the Pulpit

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A sermon delivered by The Rev. Dr. Timothy C. Ahrens,
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Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, dedicated to the staff
of First Church and all the members of the church past,
present and future over 167 years, especially the 42 who
founded our faith community on September 26, 1852,
God bless their memory for the vision they had of a better
world and always to the glory of God.

“Take Hold of the Life That is Truly Life”

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*Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of
each one of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock
and our salvation. Amen.*

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Love Is All

By Washington Gladden

Eternal Love, in thee I live and move;
I rest on thee, my being's strength and stay.
Dwell with me, I am nothing without love;
Show me thy truth, and lead me in thy way.

The world is very evil. Madness reigns;
Can men dethrone thee, making hate their lord.
Selling the fiend their souls for such vile gains
As angry led resentment can afford?

Nay, I will never learn the lore of hate,
My life is made for love, it shall not be
Battered for any less than man's estate;
Can any lack of love e'er comfort me?

Stay with me love in these temptuous days;
Shelter my heart when rage and wrath are rife.
Let me not lose my soul in passion's ways,
Keep me at peace amid the storms of strife.

I would be steadfast in resisting wrong,
And firm as adamant in fighting fate;
And true as truth when bainful lies are strong
But God forgive me if I learn to hate.

Hilda Miller was one of the kindest, sweetest, soft-spoken and most generous and loving human beings I ever knew. She had immigrated from Sweden as a young woman and settled in Cleveland, Ohio where she met and married her husband, Eugene. Together, Hilda and Eugene had one son, Eugene, Jr.

who was born at home. She lived a simple and loving life. She loved everyone and all God's creatures. She was one of God's light beams of love in this world.

Hilda Miller had never been in a hospital before she was taken there in her 86th year of life. When I reached her bedside at Metro General Hospital, she was confused and frightened and her normally steady hands were shaking. With her memory slipping some in the last few years, she was overwhelmed by all that was happening to her. Her faithful and always attentive, always present son Gene was there beside her, comforting her.

As I entered the room and sat down, all she could say was, "Why me?" She wanted to know why she couldn't have lived the remainder of days in her little home on the westside of Cleveland and there passed on to eternity, to be by the side of her beloved Eugene once more. She was ready for heaven. She wanted to die in her sleep. She didn't want to be in the hospital. She wanted to go home.

Over the next ten days Hilda declined in the hospital. The doctors found one thing after another wrong with her. Through it all, she continued to ask, "Why me?" to her young pastor and her son. All our answers failed to crack through the depth of her searching and her struggles. And then, as she faded away before our eyes, like a flower with no water, Hilda passed away. The last thing Hilda said to me as Gene and I sat by her side was, *"I love you. I love Gene. I love everyone."*

And with that, she was gone. She was eternally beside her beloved Eugene.

Hilda Miller's legacy was true and pure love. She was one of God's light beams of love in this world. After she was gone, her son Gene carried her light beam of love forward. Her sweet love and light were passed to him in the generation that followed. And he has passed it on to his children and they to theirs...

Here is the truth of our faith and the Gospel we seek to follow... In each generation, God blesses us with men and women whose life, light and love show us how to live our faith and leave a legacy. As well, we are guided by prophetic faith claims found in Holy Scripture that match economic investments to future hope!

And, the Bible is brash on themes of wealth and material possessions. The Bible's brashness is found once again in Paul's first letter to Timothy. Throughout the letter, the apostle has been laying boundaries around the Christian faith. He has been trying to give structure and form as to how we live as Christians. From a prison cell, near the end of his life, he reaches out to dear friend Timothy.

As his letter comes to the end, Paul focuses on the ultimate folly of collecting wealth. Aware that a growing number of Christians are hoarding the wealth that they accumulate, he writes to Timothy, *"A devout life brings wealth, but it is the rich simplicity of being yourself before God. Since we entered the world penniless*

and will leave it penniless, if we have bread on the table and shoes on our feet, that's enough.” (The Message, Eugene Peterson). He continues, “Living for money brings trouble and nothing but trouble. Going down that path some lose their footing of faith and live to regret it bitterly ever after.”

Paul implores Timothy to “*Run for his life*” away from people and attitudes that cling to money and lose track of righteousness and eternal life. Paul says to his close friend, Timothy, and each one of us, “*Pursue a righteous life – a life of wonder, faith, love, steadiness, and courtesy. Run hard and fast into this faith. Seize the eternal life you were called to.*” (I Timothy 6:11-12).

Paul finishes his letter with a return to those Christians who have wealth – and in our nation in this world today, I would say that is most of us here...

He writes, “*(My dear) Timothy, tell those rich in this world's wealth to quit being so full of themselves and so obsessed with (their) money, which is here today and gone tomorrow. Tell them to go after God who piles on all the riches we could ever manage – to do good, to be rich in helping others, to be extravagantly generous. If they do that, they will build a treasury that will last, gaining eternal life – life that is truly life*” (I Timothy 6:17-19).

If you and I are to build a treasury that will truly last, if you and are to gain eternal life – **life that is truly life** – we will have to figure out what really matters. We will have to figure out right now what our legacy is and what our legacy will be – and they we need to live into it.

So, what is it? What is your legacy? What will it be? How are you being remembered now? How will you be remembered when you are gone? I am thinking a lot about this today – Legacy Sunday. I hope we all are. Today is the one day each year when we pause in the life of church to reflect on legacy. As your pastor for 20 years, one of the joys and hurts of time with you has been burying hundreds of members and friends of First Church. With each transition, the reflection on legacy is real and long lasting. What legacy did your grandparents leave? What legacy did your spouse or life-long partner leave? What legacy did your father leave? What legacy did your mother leave? What legacy have your children left, if they have preceded us in death?

What legacy will you leave?

Will you be remembered as one who made some sort of difference in this world? Will your positive impact be felt and left behind? Will you be remembered as a critic of others or a positive change agent for all? Will you be remembered as lover or a hater? Will you have spent your money only on yourself or share it with others? Will laughter, transformation and beauty be your legacy or will it be something much different? Will your legacy be generosity or greed?

Will you, like the great industrialist turned philanthropist Andrew Carnegie who died penniless having given millions of dollars to build local libraries in small towns and fill their shelves with knowledge. Will you enter eternity having given

away all you had or will you (try to) take it with you? Do you even have a will and plan for giving away your estate with love and guaranteeing others will benefit from your generosity after you are gone or will your resources simply end up in probate court and eaten up by the state?

I implore you to reflect on your legacy today. And I pray that, like Hilda Miller, one of God's light beams of love in this world, you will be remembered for kindness over cattiness; generosity over greed; faith over fear; and love over hate.

Again, in the words of our own Washington Gladden:

Eternal Love, in thee I live and move;
I rest on thee, my being's strength and stay.
Dwell with me, I am nothing without love;
Show me thy truth, and lead me in thy way.

And in the words of our own Savior in the Gospel of John, "I tell you my friends this one commandment, 'love one another.' When you live such love as our savior intended, then you have taken hold of the life that is truly life. Amen.