

# Leaving a Legacy

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Dreams of Days to Come, Part 2 (Proper 28 [Year C])

St. Andrew's - Westridge

This is the second week in our “Dreams of Days to Come” sermon series, in which we’re looking at God’s dreams for our future. Last week we talked about God’s dreams for our future earthly life, dreams of the road ahead. God’s dream for our life here in the world is that we would move, that we would place neither our trust nor our understanding of our own worth in this world, but instead that we would go and become citizens of his kingdom, the kingdom where his power shapes our lives, heals our infirmities, and rules our hearts. God’s dream is a dream of joy and peace and hope — and God will make it come true if we’re willing to live in the kingdom ushered in by his resurrected Son. This we are able to do through God’s grace, by faith.

This week we’re talking about “Leaving a Legacy.” Immediately it’s worth asking whether “leaving a legacy” is even a goal worth having.

Most people dream that their life would make a difference in the world somehow, and often there’s an amorphous sort of progressive nobility behind this dream. “I want to leave the world a better place than I found it,” like a Boy Scout at a campground, but broader in scope. That’s not very specific, but it’s a good enough goal.

But at the same time, the desire to leave a legacy has lead people to scale the very heights of human pride in search of a self-constructed immortality. The monuments human beings have made to themselves, while often quite impressive (the pyramids, the Taj Mahal), are constructions of mortal human beings grasping desperately for immortality. It is not coincidental that they are often, like the pyramids, built out of the lives of thousands of other “mere mortals.”

And I need not say much beyond merely mentioning the cost of trying to find fame, the soul-destroying excesses of ego which it produces when found, and the near impossibility of maintaining the world’s attention for very long. The number of people that are famous for more than a century is so small, and even they too will be forgotten in time. Fame is always fleeting — even for the precious handful for whom it fleets slower.

This is not just try of worldly legacies; it’s true of explicitly holy and sacred legacies too. Let me tell you something sad about St. Andrew’s Episcopal Church.

Not our St. Andrew's. In fact, the St. Andrew's of which I'm speaking is in many ways our opposite. Whereas our St. Andrews is young (and this campus brand new), this St. Andrew's is old, founded in 1893. We're in Texas; this St. Andrew's is in New Haven, Connecticut. St. Andrew's, McKinney is primarily anglo; St. Andrew's, New Haven is a predominantly African-American church. St. Andrew's, McKinney is (for an Episcopal Church) relatively large at nearly 700 members; St. Andrew's, New Haven has 25 members. St. Andrew's, McKinney is financially healthy; St. Andrew's, New Haven is in debt. And most importantly, St. Andrew's, McKinney is preparing for advent with our programs, pageants, and joyful celebration of Christmas. St. Andrew's, New Haven is preparing to close; their last Sunday will be December 4, after which the building will be sold.

This is the stained glass window in St. Andrew's. It is dedicated Maude Morgan, who was born on May 9, 1868 and died Sept 19, 1919. This window was given by the members and friends of the parish, in her memory. Here's something for ole Maude, may God rest her soul: we are talking about her nearly 100 years after she died, 1500 miles away from her home parish.

But now, my friends, we are doing exactly what the disciples were doing in verse 5 of our gospel reading: we are speaking about the church building, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God.

To them, and to us, Jesus said, "As for these things that you see, the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down." Or maybe they won't tear it down; the new owners could make it a restaurant or a bar or a community center — I don't know. Who cares?

Shall we not say, with the teacher of the Biblical book of Ecclesiastes, "Vanity of vanities...All is vanity. The people of long ago are not remembered, nor will there be any remembrance of people yet to come by those who come after them" (Eccl 1:1, 11).

Psalms 31 equates death and being forgotten. Verse 12: "I am forgotten like a dead man, out of mind." Maude Morgan did better than most of us, but this is quite possibly the last time Maude Morgan, in whose memory a beautiful church was decorated not 100 years ago, will ever be mentioned aloud by a priest.

And yet I want to say something more about leaving a legacy than simply, "Don't bother." I want to encourage you to dream of leaving a divine scar on the world; a God-colored stain on the fabric of human society.

Notice I did not say an Andrew-colored stain, or a Michelle-colored stain, or a Maude-colored stain. A God-colored stain. The legacy we leave cannot be our own; if we're to make a real difference, a truly lasting difference on the world, then the

legacy we leave must be that of the living Christ. If we're to dare dream of days to come when our life shapes the world after our death, than we must bring into the world that which is alive, namely our Lord.

Now "stain" and "scar" — these aren't words with very positive connotations. But that's because there's something broken — the theological term we use for this is fallen — about the world when it comes to its relationship to God. The root cause of this, as Paul writes in Romans, is that we turn our backs on the proper worship of God, "For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him... Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things" (Rom 1:21-23). Instead of God, we choose put other things in positions of power over our life — money, pride, ourselves, sex, power...you know the list. This in turn leads to sin, but the idolatry is the root of the problem.

And last week, we learned about how Jesus Christ, first as he came in power to earth, and then, after his resurrection and ascension, as he comes to us in Spirit, makes God's kingdom available to us again. He makes it so that it is again possible to live in a place where God's power (not just God's rules!) has authority over our lives. He can break the power of the idols over our lives.

What happens at the second coming — the prelude to which is the larger context of Jesus' speech from the gospel of Luke, full of its language about various calamities and wars and persecutions — is that the kingdom of God will come in all its fullness over all creation. You can get a sense of just how opposed the powers of the world are to the power of God by how violent the description of their resistance is. This resistance is why, if you live a life that bears witness to the kingdom of God, you'll leave a scar on the world.

Now, if the Second Coming comes during your lifetime, then leaving a legacy really and truly does not matter. At all. This sermon is a waste of breath. But if, like most Christians before us, we are both born and buried in the time between the Cross and the Second Coming, then we live in a time when the kingdom of God is available to us, but has not yet taken over the world. And if we're willing to claim that citizenship and exercise its rights and responsibilities, than our lives will bring that kingdom into this world.

I've struggled to help come up with an image by which you can picture this. The best I can do is a swirl cake. Imagine a half yellow half chocolate cake. The yellow half, the plain half, that's this worldly realm. The chocolate half, the tasty half, that's the heavenly realm. Many people imagine their religious life as trying to make it so that after we run to the end of our yellow cake and die, we get to take our souls over to the chocolate cake, which never runs out.

But that's not God's primary purpose with Jesus Christ; God's purpose is to get the good chocolatey life into the yellow. A saintly life, the kind that leaves a legacy, is one that swirls chocolate into the world, swirls the kingdom of God into the heavenly realm. And once it's there, that kingdom chocolate is never getting separated back out. The world has been incredibly stained with God's grace. That's a legacy worth leaving.

This sort of legacy is unlikely to mean fame or fortune (Luke's warning from this morning's passage that "You will be hated by all for my name's sake" is more likely). This won't even guarantee that you'll be remembered as an individual person for generations to come; though who knows, maybe you'll get a stained glass like Maude.

But it does mean that someone will see your chocolate goodness in a world of drab yellow and say, "Huh? What have we here? Oh...wow...this is is delicious!"

God dreams of you living a life that brings his kingdom into the world, where it can work long after you've ceased living. This is a legacy that doesn't require doing, or making, or building anything. This doesn't take productivity books, to-do lists, charisma, or even leadership skills. You don't have to do anything, you just have to be something. The greatness of which God created you comes from being God's, and his alone.

So let go of all the pressure — self-imposed or otherwise — that comes with trying to "do something that makes a difference." You will still get to make a difference, it will just be God's difference rather than yours. And it's likely to last a lot longer that way. Amen.