

“SPIRITUAL GIFTS, THE GIFT OF OLD AGE II.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

September 14, 2014, 10:30AM

Scripture Text: Psalm 71; Proverbs 20:29; II Corinthians 4:16-18

Introduction.

Two of our senior saints are turning 80 this week, Ada Voskuilen and Ruth Weidenaar. And by God's grace they are able to still serve the Lord actively in our church and in our community.

Many people in Scripture served well past 80. Abraham was 75 when he started out for the promised land; Moses was 80 when he led the children of Israel out of Egypt; Joshua was 80 when he took over from Moses; Caleb was going strong at 85; Daniel lived past 100, Simeon and Anna (84 or 91) were worshiping and praying in the temple in their retirement years.

God used them in their old age, He can certainly use us in our old age. But not all of us end like Moses. “Although Moses was one hundred and twenty years old when he died, his eye was not dim, nor his vigor abated” (Deuteronomy 34:7). Moses was an exception to the rule.

Most of us wear down and wear out and find we just can't do all we did anymore. With this come some dangers and temptations.

The dangers and temptations of old age. What to not do in old age.

There are temptations and sins at every age that we have to guard against as Paul reminds us:

II Timothy 2:22 So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace.

Just as there are sins of youth, there are many dangers and temptations and sins of old age we have to guard against as we get older.

- 1) loneliness, long quiet, empty days, when we can feel sorry for ourselves and fall into self-pity;
- (2) regret, reliving the past, the if only's, falling into Satan's accusations and condemnation;
- (3) bitterness, unfairness in life, critical spirit, complaining;
- (4) pain, painful years, being consumed by it, and shut down by it;
- (5) fear, especially of future, worry; Gerascophobia or fear of growing old;
- (6) feeling worthless or useless;
- (7) quitting or giving up;
- (8) using time in fruitless or sinful ways, being selfish, gossiping, being a busy body.

These are real dangers at any age but they become especially strong in our senior years. From this list it's evident that Satan's doesn't give up tempting us even as we grow older. The battle with temptation and sin is never over. It calls for vigilance and boldness and prayer to the very end.

What do all those temptations and sins have in common? They are all focused on our self. When we become consumed with ourselves and our problems or fears we fall into the sins of selfishness, self-absorption, into the "it's all about me" mentality or poor me mindset.

Overcoming the temptations of old age, Psalm 71.

Psalm 71 speaks to the temptations and fears of old age and offers wisdom to fight them. The Psalmist turns his eyes upward to God and outward to others.

Psalm 71:9 Do not cast me off in the time of old age;
forsake me not when my strength is spent.

Psalm 71:17-18 O God, from my youth you have taught me,
and I still proclaim your wondrous deeds.

18 So even to old age and gray hairs, O God, do not forsake me,
until I proclaim your might to another generation, your power to all those to come.

Strength and energy and doing good works are not the only gifts of life and in fact they may not even be the best gifts in life. We may not have Moses' vigor, but we certainly can still have his faith and faithfulness.

Last time from Psalm 92 I urged us to turn away from thinking about our self to thinking about God and about how worship and prayer are two of our best gifts we can offer God. This week I want us to focus on thinking less about ourselves and more about others, about rendering service to the Lord through helping others. We will always find greater joy in living an others-oriented life. It's always more blessed to give than to receive.

The temptations of bitterness, regret, loneliness and worthlessness can't survive in the company of serving others.

Don't focus on what you can't do, focus on what you can still do.

Don't worry about death, think about living. View life as grace, as a gift and share it.

Don't complain about how much things have changed and how much worse things are, instead talk about the timeless things of our faith that never change, our ancient creeds, our eternal truth.

When you finally get to the top of the mountain of life you are tired and worn out, but you also have a much better view and perspective on the world and what's important.

God gives many good gifts to the aged. Last time we talked about worship and prayer. To that list we can add wisdom, wise counsel, godly influence, a clearer sense of what's truly important. The younger generation has never experienced what you have experienced and doesn't know what you have learned.

The church needs older men and women and it's God's purpose to provide the church with them. They can mentor and teach the younger. Many do that with their children and grandchildren.

Overcoming the temptations of old age by resting in the faithful promises of God.

Rest in what you know about God. Old age is a time for confidence and trust in God having seen all He has done and His steadfast love and faithfulness.

One day all the wicked will perish, one day all that is wrong will be made right, one day the heavens and the earth will all be made new. God's sovereignty gives assurance to the righteous that God will preserve their life for all eternity.

Even in the afflictions and sufferings and pain of growing older God has not forgotten you. As we grow older it's easy to fall into depression and feel God has abandoned us or doesn't hear our prayers anymore. We can be discouraged by failing health and failing relationships and feel God has left us alone.

Rest in the strong promises of God in Isaiah:

Isaiah 49:15-16 But Zion said, "The Lord has forsaken me; my Lord has forgotten me."

15 "Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you.

16 Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands.

There's more likelihood your own mother will forget you than that God would ever forget you.

God may lead us through many losses and trials and hardships but He will eventually show you that He has not forgotten you or abandoned you. This is a hard truth for us to grasp in the midst of difficulty when we can barely see how we will endure.

Even if you forget God, even if dementia steals your memory, God will remember you. God has not forgotten you and He cannot forget you.

Isaiah 46:3-4 "Listen to me, O house of Jacob, all the remnant of the house of Israel, who have been borne by me from before your birth, carried from the womb;

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.

Speaking of being written on the palms of His hands, that reminds me of another text.

Luke 10:17-20 The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!” 18 And he said to them, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. 19 Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you. 20 Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but *rejoice that your names are written in heaven.*”

The disciples were excited about what they had accomplished; they were excited about their success. Jesus said that’s all well and good, and you will do more, but He warned against making activity and success the ground of our joy or the ground of our worth. Those things come and they go, they wane as we grow older. Life’s circumstance can rise and fall and change drastically. Let your lasting joy and peace rest on the assurance that your name is written in heaven forever.

Maybe you don’t feel very good about what you have accomplished in life. You haven’t written a book or invented anything, you haven’t seen many people come to Christ through your testimony, you haven’t really changed the world all that much, you haven’t started some lasting ministry, you’re not well-known or famous or successful.

The most famous Christians in the world will stand in heaven on the very same ground as the most unknown humble Christians, they will be there for the very same reason, because in the grace of God their name has been written in heaven.

II Corinthians 4:16-17 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.

While our bodies and minds begin to fail us what we don’t realize is that God is still at work in our spirits refining and preparing us for heaven. When we can’t do anything anymore, it doesn’t mean that God isn’t still doing something.

We tend to value the mind, but there are depths to our soul that our mind knows nothing of. After our minds and bodies fail we wonder why we don’t just die. We think that must be it, but there is spiritual work still going on, deep work, soul work.

You get a glimpse of this spiritual soul work when someone hears an old hymn or a favorite Scripture and you see that sparkle of recognition in their eyes, their lips mouthing the words. Their spirit is still very much alive and still glorifying God. God has not abandoned them, they are still made in His very image, they are still His children, they are still the work of His hands and He is bringing to completion the good work He began so long ago.

The day our work on earth is finished is also the day the work on our home in heaven is finished and we are received into glory, because we glorified God on earth.

Don't we come full circle in life, we start weak and foolish and helpless and many end weak and foolish and helpless. And who are the one's Jesus said the kingdom of heaven belongs to? Those who are most like little children.

Should it surprise us that God should humble us and make us dependent to make us most fit for heaven? In the midst of what seems bad to us, God is bringing good, preparing us for glory.

Overcome the temptations of old age by pressing on to the sovereign purposes of God.

Philippians 3:12-14 Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. 13 Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, 14 I *press on* toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

The spiritual gifts don't quit at 65. As long as you have the Holy Spirit you have spiritual gifts and usefulness in the body of Christ. You should expect to actively serve Christ for as long as you live in whatever manner your health allows. Your service will change but it won't stop.

Don't stop serving but cultivate a lifestyle of ministry and service, just change how you serve. Don't give up, don't stop being open and available to God.

We tell kids to not waste their youth. We shouldn't waste our last year's either.

That's the prayer of the Psalmist in 71:18:

Psalm 71:18 So even to old age and gray hairs, O God, do not forsake me, until I proclaim your might to another generation, your power to all those to come.

O God, do not forsake me, until I ... How would you fill in the blank? What ministry or service could you fulfill for the glory of God and the sake of Jesus? What does God have for you yet to do?

O God, do not forsake me, until I see faith take root in my grandchildren.

Until I have written down an autobiography of my faith journey to leave my great grandchildren.

Until I can visit and pray for the residents at the retirement center or care center.

Until I can start a Senior Saints Ministry team in our church.

Until I can start a prayer and writing ministry for all our missionaries.

Until I can go on one more World Relief trip.

Until I can share my faith with another person and be an instrument in their coming to faith.

Until I can start a devotional service at the care center.

Until there is a Bible study in my neighborhood.

Until a new fellowship hall and classrooms and nursery are paid for and built.

Until abortion comes to an end in our county.

Until there is a revival of repentance and faith in our land and a great harvest of souls for the glory of God. How big a prayer will you dare to pray?

Until ... God shows you how He wants you to finish that sentence.

Application and conclusion.

Don't just get old, grow old with a purpose.

Use your retirement for the glory of God. Don't fall for the world's trap and lie that retirement is for living selfishly. God's purposes and plans don't end at 65, in fact for some they really take off. Ask God how He would like to use you for His kingdom in retirement. Pray like the Psalmist in Psalm 71. "Lord, use me to proclaim something of your majesty and might to the next generation." Use me to lay a strong foundation for the next generation.

What is our motto here? From generation to generation for the glory of God.

As strength fails, worship and pray for as long as God gives you breath. Set an example of faith, of steadfastness through the storms of life. Give good counsel seasoned with Scripture and experience.

O God, our help in ages past
Our hope for years to come,
Be Thou our guide while life shall last,
And our Eternal Home.

The best is yet to come.

Prayer:

Holy Father, thank you for all the crowns of glory in our midst, thank you for your steadfast love that has endured all the days of all our lives, even to the very end. Father, be with us as we face our fears and our losses, and help us to see your hand as you bring us through the changing seasons and prepare us for glory. Grant grace to those who are caring for spouses and loved ones and give them glimpses of your Spirit's on-going work. You seek worshipers and prayers, make us both for as long as we live for your glory.