

Sermon for Sept. 9, 2018 – “Grand Parents”

Grandparent’s Day – Texts: Ruth 4:13-17; Psalm 78:1-8; 2 Timothy 1:1-7

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Grandma Bessie was at home babysitting her granddaughter and wondered just how much her 5-year-old granddaughter Allison had learned. She picked up a box of crayons and began a test to see if she had learned her colors yet. She would pull a crayon out of the box and ask what color it was. Little Allison would tell her and always she was correct. Finally, the little girl slid out of the porch swing and headed for the door. Over her shoulder, the little girl said, “Grandma, I think you should try to figure out some of these yourself!”

A few minutes later Allison came back out carrying her grandma’s pocketbook. She sat down next to Grandma Bessie and asked if she could see her driver’s license. Bessie took out her purse and removed the driver’s license. Little Allison looked at the license and said, “that’s not a very good picture of you Grandma!” Bessie agreed. Then Allison asked, “Do you really weigh that much Grandma?” “I’m afraid so,” Bessie replied. After scanning the license for a moment, Jessica had the license back to Bessie and jumped down from the swing. As she opened the door to the house she said, “It says you flunked sex, too, Grandma!”

It’s National Grandparents Day. How many of you are grandparents? Do you realize how special you are? How unique in all Creation you are? What makes grandparents so unique is their influence...which shouldn’t be surprising. The impact of grandpas and grandmas in history is beyond calculation. Most of the famous people of the Bible from Adam and Eve on were grandparents. Often grandparents played a key role, if not **the** key role, in the way history has unfolded. In Genesis (chapter 5), there’s an account of a man named Enoch the son of Jared and the Father of Methuselah. Methuselah (who lived to be 969 years old) was the father of Lamech. You better believe that Enoch walked close to God and for that reason, his grandson Lamech expressed that faith by the name he gave his son. The grandson’s name? Noah – which means rest, comfort, consolation. And I think we know what kind of faith Noah had. Hezekiah was one of the best kings Israel ever had. His father was Ahaz, one of the worst. But Hezekiah’s grandfather was Jotham who did right in the eyes of the Lord. Hezekiah took after his grandfather rather than his father and the result was victory for God’s kingdom. Which tells us (if nothing else) that because of the potential influence of grandparents there’s always hope even if one generation goes astray because the next generation can be brought back. They often bridge the gap between parents and children.

The relationship of grandparents and grandchildren is so unique because it’s so full of hope and expectation. The passage in our first reading from the Book of Ruth is one of the best exaltations of a grandparent you’ll find anywhere. It’s almost as if the goal of this book was a happy ending with grandma Naomi holding grandson Obed in her lap and everybody singing her praises. The story of Ruth and Boaz dominates most of the book, but once Ruth had Obed she and Boaz aren’t heard from again and the spotlight focuses on grandma Naomi for the remainder of the story. Naomi has a comfort for her old age. Naomi has a grandson. Grandma’s now the star! This is radical, this removal of the parents and grandparents and grandchild coming front and center. It’s a powerful revelation showing just how important grandparents can be in a child’s life.

In fact, every person in the blood line from Adam to Christ was a grandparent except, of course, Christ Himself. God is into genealogies. I count about 25 in the entire Bible. In fact, the New Testament itself begins with a genealogy in the gospel of Matthew. And so, God is into grandparents. By-and-large, the Book of Ruth exists to trace the roots of David, the greatest of Israel's kings and a man after God's own heart. Obed, grandson of Naomi, would become King David's grandfather. The Book of Ruth ends a genealogy placing a special emphasis on grandparents and for that reason, I don't think we'll find a better biblical text for Grandparent's Day. Except perhaps for the text of our second reading. One of the things we know about Timothy is that his Christian faith had its roots in his grandmother. Paul's clear on that. In fact, Paul made a major point of the roots of Timothy's faith because of a simple fact which is that grandparents often make a big difference in the lives of their grandchildren.

Personally, it's hard for me to imagine what kind of person I'd be without the influence of my grandparents, especially my maternal grandmother. The older I get the more I realize how important my relationship with her was, and still is. Without it I don't know where I'd be in my walk with Christ. I belonged to a greater family of people than just mom and dad and that's important for establishing identity. Being adopted, I'm very much aware of this and incredibly grateful. Anthropologist Margaret Mead once wrote "Somehow, we have to get the older people...grandparents, widows and widowers, spinsters and bachelors...back close to children if we are to restore a sense of community, a knowledge of the past and a sense of future to today's children." Grandparents can be just that, parents who are grand. They don't necessarily have to be the disciplinarians of life so, they're freer to be the teachers of values. Grandparents have opportunities to talk and share in ways that parents often don't have or don't take advantage of because they don't have the same perspective grandparents do. Grandparents are often the key to a child's self-esteem. Children can be difficult, and life is complex and often parents give most of their energy to discipline and only a fraction to love. This is where the grandparents can add the ingredient that makes the family balanced. In troubled families they're even more important. Even if the opportunities are few and far between grandparents can still have a powerful influence on their grandchildren's self-esteem. Grandparents provide the opportunity for grandchildren to develop roots and establish an identity that's not limited to the present, a present that's far from ideal.

In his book *The Grandmother Conspiracy*, pediatrician Lewis Coffin wrote "As soon as a person becomes a grandparent he or she undergoes a radical personality change. Stern fathers become cooing grandfathers, harping mothers melt and crawl on the floor, sing lullabies and cram cookies, cookies and more cookies down their sweet little grandchildren's throats. They take them to the ice-cream store, bake cakes and pies for them, and stand back admiringly as their little ones swell, pinch their obese little cheeks approvingly and raise Cain if anyone tries to interfere!" In other words, they spoil their grandkids! Those of you who are grandparents, you wouldn't know anything about that would you? Seriously, how many spoil their grandkids? Do your kids yell at you when you do that? My mother would spoil my sister's son rotten and it drove my sister nuts! It seems to me that grandparents tend to spoil grandchildren is because of this renewal of their minds which scripture tells us is a good thing.

Remember the first time you found out that you were going to be a grandparent? How overjoyed were you? So many people have told me that the feeling never gets old and that they're just so grateful for the joy over this new life that they express their gratitude by being over indulgent. In an article in a 1995 American Academy of Pediatrics journal a 9-year-old wrote a now classic description of a grandmother. She wrote...“A grandmother is a lady who has no children of her own so she likes other people's little girls. A grandfather is a man grandmother. He goes for walks with the boys and they talk about fishing and tractors and stuff like that. Grandmas don't have to do anything except be there. They're old, so they shouldn't play hard or run. It's enough if they drive us to the market where the pretend horse is and have lots of quarters ready. Or if they take us for walks, they should slow down past things like pretty leaves or caterpillars. They never ever say ‘hurry up.’ Usually they are fat, but not too fat to tie kid's shoes. They wear glasses and funny underwear. They can take their teeth out. They don't have to be smart, only answer questions like why dogs hate cats and how come God isn't married. They don't talk baby talk like some people do because it's hard to understand. When they read to us they don't skip pages. Everybody should try to have one especially if you don't have television because grandmas are the only grown-ups who've got time.” Time is one of the treasures of life that grandparents have learned to use more wisely. Dale Evans-Rogers wrote a lot about her 16 grandchildren, and her advice is this...“If you want to establish a warm bond with your grandchildren, get rid of the parents. That is, be alone with your grandchildren.” It's been said that the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren is like the period of courtship, while the relationship between parents and children is more like that of marriage. What they're saying is that the first is more dominated by fun and the second by responsibility which is a big reason why there's a different psychology at work. It seems clear then, that grandparents are key figures in the lives of most children.

And here, brothers and sisters, is the thing. Grandparents are an important part of God's plan in bringing about His kingdom. We see it in David's heritage in his grandmother Ruth and Timothy's in his grandmother Lois, but the stories are endless and they are going on today in the lives of millions. As I close, I'd like to leave you with a poem by Stacy Smith. It expresses beautifully, just how special grandparents are.

Grandparents are special people
With wisdom and with pride.
They are always offering love and kindness
And are always there to guide.

They often make you feel
So confident and strong.
Their arms are always open
No matter what you did wrong.

They try to help out
In every way that they can.
They love all their grandchildren the same
Whether you're a child, woman or man.

They are always there to listen
And to lend a helping hand.
They show you respect
And they try to understand.

They give their love, devotion and so much more,
That's easy to see.
Grandparents – what perfect examples
Of the kind of person that we should be.

Thanks be to God.

Amen and amen.