

**Passing the Baton**  
(Matt 7:24-27, Heb 12:1-3)

Oct 1, 2023  
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Today, I substituted two readings for the scheduled readings in order to highlight a feature of our lives that comes up every year around this time. Fall is a time when our minds turn toward “gathering,” whether it be gathering to engage in the work of the church, kids going back to school or families making plans for Thanksgiving and Christmas.

Nature itself presses this theme upon us, as the cooling climate draws us closer together indoors and as farms gather their crops into barns. And along with the harvest, there is a shortening of days and increase in the hours of darkness, that naturally leads us to another kind of gathering, a gathering of our thoughts; especially our thoughts about endings and beginnings and how the two go together.

And so, on the last Sunday in this month of October, we will celebrate All Saints Day, when we gather memories of the saints in our lives. We will give ourselves some sacred time to remember family members, friends, pew mates and others who have inspired us with their words and deeds and been gathered up before us into the arms of God. They are God’s harvest. They are a cornucopia that continues to feed and sustain us spiritually through the year.

Lately, I have come to feel a growing sense of how important it is that we cherish and reflect on these memories; not because I am getting older and more nostalgic, but because I am concerned that forces in our world are stripping us of our ability to remember and are separating us from the wisdom and guidance that has given us our identity as children of God.

Churches like ours exist as a way to connect the past with the present and future, through a story that reveals the true nature and saving power of love; a story that has been handed down to us, not only through scripture, but through the words and deeds of those who came before us. And I think we have a responsibility to see to it that the best in what has been handed down to us doesn't get lost.

I am talking about the recognition that we were created as sacred vessels designed to be filled with the love of God and that it is our life's work to love our neighbors as ourselves. I am speaking of the belief that caring for each other requires that we be trustworthy and honest and that this includes being honest with ourselves; that we are to pluck the log from our own eyes, before removing the speck from the eye of another, as Jesus instructed us to do.

Humility, fairness, kindness. These are all commitments that our faith sets high standards for. They are not optional. And it for us to hold to these standards regardless of what the rest of the world chooses to do.

And in this world where distrust of institutions has led to an epidemic of loneliness, we represent the belief that being part of a community of faith is also essential. The truth is that we become the ripened fruit for God's harvest, not by criticizing the church from a supposedly higher vantage point of our own as so many choose to do, but by being present in the mix, however messy, where we can respond to the often surprising ways the Spirit moves amongst us. And, of course, there is our belief that when at last we find our true selves, it is as servants of God's love for the world.

### **Our Moral Architecture**

You will recognize these as being among the key beliefs that have been handed down to us in the language of our faith, through Bible and hymnals and human example. They have come down to us in the language and forms of a past that seems outdated to people with modern sensibilities. And we have to be honest about it and accept that some of it is.

But these beliefs should not be so easily dismissed. They are in many ways like the beams of a well constructed house that sits on a firm foundation and that has a structure that conforms well to the laws of gravity. And the fact that the house is old does not by any stretch mean that it's craftsmanship is inferior. We are, after all talking about a house that has withstood the test of time for 2000 years and whose foundation goes back another 1000.

When we talk about our faith, we are talking about what can be called our "moral and spiritual architecture". It is the inner architecture of our minds and hearts. And this inner world we construct in which we dwell, needs to be built in accordance with a particular kind of gravitational pull, the gravitational pull of God's love. Because if the house itself is built on any other basis, it will collapse and fall on us.

### **A Tour of Today's House**

Let me take you through the moral house that is being built for us today and describe some flaws in it's architecture. There is the belief that we should aspire to be masters rather than servants. According to this view, smart people only get involved in situations where they will experience the greatest gain at the expense of others.

Your eye doesn't have to follow this beam very far to recognize that it is completely at odds with the gravitational pull of God's love. It is surely responsible for the collapse of many civic institutions and churches, communities and families, that all rely on a willingness on our part to serve the needs of others.

Here is another really bad piece of moral architecture. Two cross beams are set against each other? They appear to be in perfect balance. But actually there is no give in either one. They make the house rigid, unable to bend in the breeze, because neither side is able to admit to being wrong and must always be right. And so, when a big storm comes along, the house collapses. That is what happens when the flexibility of repentance and forgiveness is not built into the design. This tells us that some of our nations architects in Congress, need to go back and reflect on what they learned in Sunday school.

In my opinion, there are many design flaws, that are causing our great American house to sway dangerously in the breeze. And I think that it is swaying so precariously because we are losing our understanding of how much its stability depends on taking into account the moral and spiritual laws of gravity when we construct the inner character that is necessary for our nation to stand.

And I think that it is in part by remembering our ancestors and how and why they inspired us is really important for us, because the moral and spiritual gravity by which they sought to live is the same today as it was then. Many things change, and so they should. But the importance of adhering to the basic principles of our faith will never change. And the consequences of failing to adhere to them will also never change.

### **Passing the Baton**

Passing the baton from one generation to the next has probably always been a tricky thing. Times are always changing and passing anything from one hand to another without dropping it takes special attention, especially when everything is in motion, as it is in the “race of life”. That is why I think it is worth giving special attention to the theme of “Passing the Baton” through this month leading up to All Saints Sunday.

Let me touch again on the Children’s Message and explain what we hope to do. Many, perhaps all of us, have in our possession some kind of “baton” that was handed down to us from someone dear to us, a saint who is no longer with us. In other words, a keepsake. You may be wearing a wedding ring that was worn by your grandmother, have a

photo, a quilt or some keepsake that helps you to remember that person and inspires you to carry forward the Spirit in which that person lived.

Please talk amongst yourselves and or consider whether you have a keepsake which you would be willing to share on one of the next three Sundays as part of the children's message. We have a microphone and I or one of the deacons would be happy to sit beside you to hold the mic or assist you. If you are willing to do this, please talk to Janet Andrews, Mark Fisk, LuAnn Herrick or Paul MacMunn and we will go from there.

One thing that I think is so wonderful about these keepsakes that we pass on, is that you never know where they will end up or who they may someday inspire. The smallest moment of thoughtfulness, an act of kindness, a gift given 50 years ago, can come back to life again and shed its blessing a second time, here or even half way around the world. And it can have a positive impact far beyond anything the giver ever imagined.

Let us give thanks together today, remembering that as we share Communion with each other, we do so with the knowledge that Jesus and all the saints who have been a blessing to us are present with us.

They are surrounding us, even now, as “a great cloud of witnesses, cheering us on” and they will be sharing with us as we partake of the body and blood of our servant King Jesus Christ, and rejoicing with us in his blessing.

*[I think the Bible is right about something that we today are wrong about. And that is our belief that technology has more power to save us than does a change of heart].*

When a builder looks at a well constructed old house and wants to share it with someone else, it probably becomes apparent that there are just too many clever details and solutions, to be able to do justice to the whole in one walk through.

. And the same is true of There is just too much in the wonderful details in the design. It is true that, as a student of the Bible I probably have a greater appreciation for what has been passed down to us than most people who are busy being focused on the current moment. I know that the past is far from perfect. But I also believe that our tottering house will fall unless we are able to hear it