

GRANDPARENTS ARE FOR REMEMBERING  
MAY 24, 1987

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A farmer had finished his weekly Saturday shopping trip. He had loaded his horse-drawn wagon, and was ready to start for home, when he had a nagging feeling he had forgotten something. He got out his list, read it, inventoried his purchases which were piled on the wagon, decided he had not forgotten anything, and started for home. All the way home he had the suspicion that he had forgotten something. When he drove into the yard, the kids, expecting to get their usual candy treat, ran to meet him, shouting, "Where's Mama?" Then he remembered what he had forgotten.

This is the weekend for remembering. We remember those who have given their lives for our country. Many of you will visit cemeteries or mausoleums sometime today or tomorrow, place flowers, and remember your departed loved ones. You will tell each other stories about the past, funny or moving incidents you remember. I remember those trips to the cemeteries with my family when I was a child, and I delighted to hear the stories of my family. I remember drives we would take through the countryside and my mother would point out various homes in which she lived, the one room school she attended, the place where my great-grandmother had lived, and who the neighbors were.

Remembering is vital. When we forget our history, we are liable to repeat the mistakes. Remembering is essential to a sense of identity. How can you know who you are if you don't know from where and from whom you have come? Without roots how can a tree grow? Visiting the holy land from which our faith has come was an unbelievable remembering experience. Seeing the sites of the biblical events put context into the old stories. How grateful we are for those stories. How rich is our faith because of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Moses and Joshua, David, etc. And how did these stories come to us? It was centuries before those stories were written down. How were they preserved? How were they communicated? How were they remembered? By grandparents. Grandparents told the stories. The patriarchs and matriarchs kept the stories alive by telling and retelling. Grandparents are for remembering.

In our Epistle lesson this morning, Paul wrote to young Timothy to encourage him in his ministry. In the first chapter of II Timothy, Paul tells Timothy how important he is to him, how Paul prays for him, and how Paul misses him. Then Paul reminds Timothy of the rich heritage he has in the faith. He reminds Timothy of all he has received from his mother, Eunice, and his grandmother, Lois. Timothy is the recipient of a three-generation faith, and his grandmother had an important part in Timothy's development. Grandmother Lois no doubt told the stories. She remembered.

How do you account for the fact that the Christian faith remains remarkably alive and well in the Soviet Union, in spite of the state's official efforts to suppress religion and re-educate the young? Someone answered, "Grandmothers." For years now it has been observed that in the Russian Orthodox Churches, only old women were worshipping. But for 60 years! They can't be the same women worshipping for 60 years. These later grandmothers were once children under the communist suppression. Yet they now believe. The grandmothers told the stories. Grandmothers are for remembering.

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A grandparent helps a child, a youth, and even adults gain a perspective on history and reality. Both my grandfathers were great story tellers. My Grandpa Irwin could keep us on the edge of our chairs telling us stories about card games. He loved to play cards, and could remember games he had played years before. He would tell us what cards the players held, and how they played them! He either had a terrific memory or was a fantastic story teller! My Grandpa Norris enjoyed telling stories of our family. A highlight was to be able to stay overnight with Grandpa Norris. We would talk into the wee hours of the morning. How I loved the anecdotes of his youth, where he lived, what he did, what happened in the depression, and my favorite stories, of course, were about my coming into the world, and what I was like as a baby. How precious to a child are the stories of grandparents. Before he died, my father-in-law was hospitalized for several months. He knew he was dying and talked about it freely. Ellie took a cassette recorder and asked him questions about his life. Now we have hours of priceless tapes on her family history. What a beautiful and healthy way to leave this earth: to pass on the stories, to remember.

People seem to be living longer these days, and as Glenn, Bishop Stuart, the Visiting Circle, and I visit with the elderly, we hear a repeated refrain, "I'm no good to anyone anymore. I don't know why God keeps me here." There are many reasons why a person is still needed on this earth, and one important purpose is to tell the stories, to remember and pass on the stories. I believe that all of us, especially the children, need to remember. We need that sense of identity. We need to know our roots, roots in our natural families, our roots as a nation, and the biblical roots of our religion. We need grandparents to put life and breath into those roots.

A class of third graders was given an assignment to write essays. One of them chose the subject, "What is a Grandmother?" He wrote,

A grandmother is a lady who has no children of her own. She likes other people's children...A grandfather is a man grandmother...Grandmothers don't have to do anything except be there...They're old so they shouldn't play hard or run...Everybody should have one, especially if they don't have television, because grandmas are the only grownups who've got time...They don't have to be smart, only answer questions like, "Why dogs hate cats, and how come God isn't married?"

The famous anthropologist, Margaret Mead, made a serious indictment. "One of the reasons we have as bad a generation gap today as we do is because grandparents have copped out." Grandparents have abdicated. Somehow many of grandparent age feel they are not wanted or needed. Are we afraid of imposing? Or, are we unsure of our place in modern society? Because the children and grandchildren are living such different lives these days, do some of us feel that the experience of grandparents is no longer relevant?

Grandparents are so important today, grandparents ought to be adopted. The more grandparents a person, the more fortunate he/she is. And, likewise, every person who is over 40 should play the role of grandparent to the children and youth in the congregation, and to one another as well. Adopt the children, youth, young adults, and young parents in our congregation. Learn

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their names. Go out of your way to speak to the children and younger people. There are many single young adults, single parent families, and double parent families who live here on the peninsula far from home. Their extended family lives miles away. One role a church can play in urban living is to be an extended family for one another.

No one can make it alone these days. As the song says, "Number one is the loneliest number you'll ever do." Few of us have the resources to live successful, productive lives without support, encouragement, and love. Few of us can make it without well established roots in family and faith deeply planted in a fertile, watered soil. Do you know what else most of us need? We don't need any more people telling us what to do. We don't need any more people telling us what we are doing wrong! We don't need people giving us advice. We need grandparents or grandparent figures who will love us, accept us, tell us the stories, help us remember, and spoil us a little bit. We all need someone in our lives who think we are perfect! We all need grandparent figures who think we can do no wrong, and when we do, will say, "Well, boys will be boys."

No one should feel useless or without a calling these days. We can all be grandparents to one another. Or, if you don't feel old enough to be called a grandparent, be aunts, uncles, cousins, brothers and sisters to one another. Probably most of us are too modest. We are shy and feel that our friendship is not wanted or needed. I challenge that assumption. I see lots of lonely people afraid to reach out to others. I see lots of people wanting to be useful in the service of God, but too modest to reach out. There are single young adults in our congregation who might be thrilled to be invited out to lunch, who might be eager to have adopted grandparents. There are single parents in our congregation who might be thrilled to have a shoulder to lean on, to have someone care about their difficult task, and listen over a cup of coffee. There are young families in our congregation who spend the major holidays alone because their natural families live far away. There are refugees and immigrants who are trying to fit in to our society, trying to find a place, and who would be thrilled to have your interest. There are college students and high school students--teenagers--who will respond to your greeting. They will be thrilled to be called by name. They will welcome a nonthreatening relationship where they are accepted; not judged or criticized, but accepted. There are children jumping in our halls, filled with energy, who want to be noticed, hugged and loved. There are elderly folk who perhaps don't need grandparents, but who need adopted grandchildren to notice them, appreciate them, call them by name, inquire of their health, invite them to coffee.

We are living in an uprooted society where there is loneliness, estrangement, and a lack of self-confidence. We are living in a society where we all need each other. We all need folks to listen, appreciate, and encourage us. We all need to hear the stories, stories of our ancestry, stories of our nation, and stories of our faith, to give us a strong sense of identity. We all need grandparents and we need to be grandparents--to listen, encourage, and remember.

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II TIMOTHY 1:1-7

JOHN 14:15-21

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