

The Last Lecture

November 2, 2008

Message part 1

Today is the time when we devote the service to remembering our loved ones who have died, and I know this can be difficult for many of us, particularly those for whom the loss is very fresh. And I know it's hard for some because the whole topic of death is one many of us prefer to avoid.

Nonetheless, the reality is that death is very much a part of life, and it seems as though we've had a lot of death of those very close to The Garden in the last year—people like Joe Leonard, Bob Sparks, Kenita Johnson, Sherry Fortner, Shirley Fox, and most recently Judi O'Neal, so we've had to come to terms with the way in which death is such a part of life, and as basic to life's cycle as is birth. It's something every single one of us will experience, both in the loss of those very dear to us, and eventually as our own life on this earth comes to an end.

In truth, our time here is limited, and I am of the opinion that it matters how we live our lives during the years we are fortunate enough to live them. This morning, we're going to hear from one who received a doctor's diagnosis about the terminal nature of his illness, and then had the opportunity to share his wisdom and perspective on life with others. The man was Randy Pausch, a husband and father of three young children, a very popular professor at Carnegie Mellon Institute, and a man who had cancer and who died last summer.

However he was given the opportunity to say his good-byes to his students and fellow faculty members at Carnegie Mellon in what was traditionally referred to as the "Last Lecture." Today we're going to use some segments of his talk to help us reflect on the lives of our family members and friends who are no longer with us, as well as to give us the opportunity to reflect on our own mortality, and how we're living our own lives.

Pausch's last lecture has been viewed millions of times. Let's watch as he began to share his story what was going on with him...

Message part 2

Randy Pausch points out one thing which many of us discover when we walk close to death—that the notion most of us have that we're in control of life is really a myth. The way he told his story reminds me of something Victor Frankl wrote in the book *A Man's Search for Meaning*. Frankl was a prisoner in a Nazi concentration camp during World War II, and in the book, he comments about how differently the men in the camp viewed their situation. He wrote, "They offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way." In other words, he's saying that

we can't control what comes our way, but we can decide to determine our response to what happens.

I think that's one of the ways we can understand the Bible passage we have for this morning. It's one we've used before, and frankly, one of my favorite passages. It's a reminder that how we live our lives is really up to us, and mostly up to the mindset we choose to have. The writer Paul says, "Each of you must take responsibility for doing the creative best you can with your own life." That's something for us to think about as we walk through our days.

Well, Pausch has some ideas about ways to take responsibility for doing the creative best we can with our lives. Let's see what he had to say...

Message part 3:

Pausch seemed to believe that anything was possible, and even if something was not actually achievable, there was much to be gained in the trying. I think that, too, ties in with what it means to live our creative best, giving everything we attempt our best shot, all the while knowing we may not attain our goals.

In the course of life, we may have to change courses; we will encounter those brick walls, and some may be insurmountable. We will have our fair share, or perhaps even more than our fair share, of heartache, disappointment and loss, but there is much to be said for hanging in there, keeping on keeping on, continuing to try. It means we keep moving forward in the best way possible, living life as fully as possible, even when we think we're certain of the ultimate outcome.

Message part 4:

Randy Pausch packed a lot of wisdom and encouragement into his last lecture as he shared what he believed to be important about living life, and he offered so much more than we have time to show. The reality is that is we could absorb all that Randy Pausch had to share, it would make an incredible difference for us, and for everyone we encounter! It's about having our priorities in line, first things first, and living true to them. It's about the legacies our loved ones have left by the way they lived their lives, and the legacy you and I are leaving as we live ours.

To me, Pausch gave a wake-up call and a loving nudge to all of us about what really matters. When it's all said and done, it's about the people in our lives—our family, our friends, all those who play a role in our life stories. It's about the connections we make, the forgiveness we offer and receive, the precious ordinary moments we share. Those moments are what we celebrate and remember this morning, because all those we love have touched our lives in a special way, and they are always with us. There is deep sadness, too, because they are physically gone from us, but we can be comforted that their love for us, our love for them, and their spirit will last forever.

CLOSING:

There's a poem that I sometimes use when I officiate at funeral services, and it's one that, for me, captures what a person's true legacy is. A friend shared it with me a number of years ago, and I'd like to share it with you. It was written by Dan Baker, and it goes like this:

The day will come when you will lie upon this bed in which you'll die. And the grief-filled eyes of those who care will vanish soon as if in error, 'cause all that counts upon that day will be the price that you dared to pay. The love you had and the love you gave, is all that counts when in your grave. The things that ate up all your time, they matter naught now in your mind, because as the light and darkness meet, life hands to you your balance sheet. And there by yourself you'll read the score, and it's all about love, love and nothing more.

The money, the time, the wasted days, they're not allowed to have their say. Alone you see with tearful eyes, that values on those years gone by were not of the things you held so dear, but only the people right here. And as your spirit starts to soar, it was love, love and nothing more.

It truly is all about love—love, and nothing more.
Have a good Sunday, and go in peace. Amen