

BUILDING SOMETHING FOR ETERNITY
Labor Day Weekend –September 2, 2012 –I Corinthians 15: 51-58 –Communion
The Church of the Covenant

Ever walk in Washington Cemetery? I go up there to pray sometimes and you can't help notice all the large monuments with what I am sure are prominent family names on them, monuments to people who were community leaders, successful in business, maybe even a well-known preacher or two in the mix. But who were these people? We know they were prominent because there are streets named for them. But other than a loved one or two who are still around, does anyone remember them? For all their hard work and success will it mean anything a generation or two from now? Not just people pass away but also the memory of them passes away. So what did all their toil signify? So on this Labor Day Weekend when we consider the significance of our life's work, the fruit of our labors, I am asking the question – are we building something with our lives that will last? Or are we building something with them that will blow away like a puff of smoke when we are gone? Are we building something for eternity, or not?

The Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes puts it this way –*“Vanity of vanities, says the preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity. What do people gain from all the toil at which they toil under the sun?”* (Ecclesiastes 1: 2-3) Vanity means something that doesn't last, something that is temporary, ephemeral, passing, the flavor of the month, something that is here today and gone tomorrow, dust in the wind, as permanent as the dew that dissipates with the sunrise. Is our life just “vanity” or is it something more?

As people we tend to invest a lot of time in our homes. We paint them the way we like, we add things to them we like and they become, in a way, extensions of who we are. Ever gone back to look at a house you used to own? It either makes you mad or sad what the new owners have done to it. I just sold my home in Mt. Lebanon and on the day of closing I thought to myself, “I'll just go over and take one last look at it.” So the closing is just over, I've just signed it over to the new owners, and I drive over to a perpendicular street where you can see the house and I park on the street and look up at “my house”. There are already three cars in the driveway I don't recognize and the new owners literally are ripping out the new carpeting on the second floor and throwing hunks of carpet out the second story window. I just shook my head and thought –“Not my house anymore. Not my house.” All those projects I did there didn't even last for two minutes. Vanity of vanities, says the preacher. All is vanity.

Gee, as a people we put an awful lot of our heart and life into sports, the watching and the playing of them, and games and recreation. I think there's a value to it in a way; there's a value in being re-created through relaxation. That's true. But please don't suggest to me that its important what the Steeler's score will be a thousand years from now. Trust me –no one will remember and no one will care. For all we invest in it, it just doesn't matter that much. Vanity of vanities, says the preacher. All is vanity.

Ever move from one job to another? We invest so much of our life in our work. We sacrifice and focus so much of our energies there. Our families get second priority. We work so much we can't go to church. We busy ourselves with business. Even in churchworld people so easily “move on”, forget who you are and what you did. I went back to one church I had served and someone was greeting me at the door and she was complementing me on all the work I had done with the “young people” and then said, “So I really just want to thank you, Daryl”. Daryl was the other Associate Pastor. How soon they all forget. Vanity of vanities, says the preacher. All is vanity.

When I served as Interim Pastor at First Presbyterian Church in downtown Pittsburgh I became entranced by remembering one of their great pastors there, Dr. Clarence Macartney, Jr. He was

Moderator of the General Assembly, his name still appears on lists of the 10 greatest Protestant preachers, he was the very first radio preacher on KDKA radio, in his day he was more famous than Joel Osteen or any of the big names today. He preached a sermon entitled, "Come Before Winter", that was famous and its fame outlived the man who preached it. There is a room in the McCartney Library at Geneva College where all his books, all the books he had written in his life, all his sermons and even the research work on sermons he never got to preach is stored. He passed away in 1957 and is buried up on a hill overlooking the Beaver River, and Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania, and Geneva College. I searched out his grave and found it. I brushed off the old dirt and grass, obvious that I was the only person to visit in quite some time. It is a small headstone set flat in the ground, has his name, his dates on it, and the words from second Timothy and his greatest sermon on it, "Come Before Winter..." *"Do your best to come before winter."*, wrote the Apostle Paul. (2 Timothy 4: 21) Better come now, young Timothy, because it is not just people who pass away. All the work of your hand passes away, as well. As the great hymn notes: "We fly forgotten as a dream dies..." One of the greatest preachers of Protestantism lies forgotten. Vanity of vanities, says the preacher. All is vanity.

People today crave meaning and significance. People today want their lives to matter. People want to make a difference and a difference that lasts. People want to build something for eternity with their lives. But it depends how you invest your life. It depends how you spend your time. It depends.

By contrast to all I have said up to this point in time, now discover what is NOT VAIN, what endures and lasts, and not just for a generation, but for all time. If Ecclesiastes says all is vanity, then the Apostle Paul in our scripture lesson reminds us that *"in the Lord your labor is not in vain."* (1 Corinthians 15: 58) Paul writes: *"Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain."* As we work for the Lord what we do with our lives is not in vain; it is not vanity. And it is not in vain and it is not vanity, not because people will remember us, nor visit our tombstone, but because it is linked inexorably to that which is eternal. Our work, as it is linked to the Lord, is eternal. As we invest in people, not things, our work is eternal. As we invest our lives in church our work is eternal. As we find our re-creation in the Spirit of the living God our time is not fleeting, it is eternal. As we invest ourselves, our lives, our time in the things of the Kingdom, these things will not pass away. As we connect our life to the Lord Jesus Christ, He alone who lives when all else is dust, then we become eternal; the power of the resurrection lives and abides and is at work within, and that is eternal, that is eternity at work, in, around and through us. Connect your life today with the Lord Jesus Christ and your life is not in vain. It lives eternally and forever. Have the eternal come through the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ and live within you today. Here is the interior, spiritual work that never passes away, the work of the Lord within, that makes our labor, not in vain.

We come now to a time of communion, communing with that which is eternal in the Lord God Almighty. We come now to a work of the Lord in our lives, as God Himself ministers to us in this time of communion. We come now to a time where the Savior who is everlasting and never ending comes to us and communes with us, and we are touched and transformed by the eternal, in order to link our lives to the eternal, and in order that our work that we do for Jesus becomes eternal as well.

Decide in these moments whether you want to link your life to that which is vain...or whether you want to link your life and your work and your labor to Jesus...because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain. BUILD SOMETHING FOR ETERNITY TODAY. Amen.

*By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, PA
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*

