**2 Timothy 2:1-10**

**Leaving a good legacy**

At various times in life, we think about the legacy we want to leave behind us.

Perhaps the most profound time for thinking about this is as we enter the later stages of life, and we look back and reflect on the impact we have made in the world, and we look forward to the time that we have left to us, and we think through what we might do, what we might want to achieve so that our legacy is a good one.

Sometimes, we might think about the legacy we are leaving at the stage we call ‘mid-life’. There might still be time to change a career, change a relationship, take up new hobbies, lay down old patterns of behavior. The mid-life crisis is not necessarily a negative thing in that it helps us to reflect and make good decisions about the legacy we will leave.

Perhaps we may think about the legacy we will leave when we are changing jobs, or changing the location in which we live; we move on – we want to have made a difference…

But also, I think, we should be thinking about the legacy that we will leave in every social interaction in which we engage through the week. Every time we talk with someone, or email them, or phone them, we are leaving a legacy, an impact on their lives: for good or for bad.

What legacy do you want to leave: when you die, when you reflect on your life and on a daily basis?

A wasted life – or a life full of wasted opportunities – is not what we want, is it?

That is exactly what Paul was thinking about when he wrote this letter to Timothy. Paul was nearing the end of his life: he was under house arrest by the Romans and he was facing execution by beheading. No doubt Paul had plenty of time to look back over his life and consider all that he had achieved for God, and his chief concern was to establish a church that would continue to thrive and grow long after he had died.

Timothy was a fairly young Christian who Paul had been nurturing in the faith and Timothy was responsible for running a church that Paul had established. So now Paul is writing to Timothy to encourage him to keep strong in the faith after Paul, his mentor, has died. It is a beautiful letter, full of encouragement, and there is a lovely closing statement from Paul in 4:6: “The hour has come for me to be sacrificed”, he writes. “The time is here for me to leave this life. I have done my best in the race, I have run the full distance, and I have kept the faith. And now there is waiting for me the victory prize of being put right with God, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that day – and not only to me, but to all those who wait with love for him to appear.”

Isn’t that a lovely statement? It’s a real sense of a life well-lived and a good legacy left. How wonderful it would be to die with that degree of confidence. And it’s that confidence in our legacy that Paul is encouraging Timothy towards, and all of us towards, as he writes the passage we heard read a few minutes ago.

So, how can we leave a good legacy through our lives and in our daily interactions? How can we make a positive difference in the world?

Paul suggests four very simple things in this passage:

**1. Consider the place of Grace in your legacy**

In verse 1, Paul writes this: “As for you, my son, be strong through the grace that is ours in union with Christ Jesus”.

We thought about the nature of grace a few weeks back and how grace is common to all of us as Christians because it has to do with showing kindness and compassion towards others because that is what we have first received from God.

And if we want to leave a good legacy with others in our daily lives, or in our lives in their totality, one of the greatest things that we can do is to show Grace towards others. The people who have had the greatest impact on my life are the people who have showed me the greatest amount of grace.

For example, a man named John who ran the Church Youth Group of which I was a part in the 1980s when I was a teenager. To be honest, I was a pretty obnoxious person then (I know that’s hard to believe!) and I did give John a hard time as he tried to lead our group. But John showed me grace upon grace upon grace. Although he wasn’t slow to challenge my unruly behavior, he always did so with kindness and compassion. And as his grace infiltrated my being, so he gradually introduced me into leadership and I eventually took over the running of the Youth Group from him. And, in his grace and kindness, he nurtured me and mentored me in the faith to the point of putting myself forward for the priesthood. And I wouldn’t be here today had it not been for the grace of my friend John shown to me over many years.

Perhaps you have people like that in your own lives: people who have poured out grace and kindness and compassion on you and have nurtured you by their example to make you the person you are today. Grace is their legacy on you.

But can others same the same of you? Can other people tell their story and have your name appear in it as the person who showed such grace and kindness and compassion towards them that you radically impacted their lives for the better?

Think about that for a moment.

Isn’t that the sort of legacy that you would want to leave behind?

As Paul tells Timothy here, “Be strong through grace…”

Sometimes it is very hard to show grace towards someone, especially when it seems that they are taking you for granted and treating you poorly in return. But we need to be strong through grace because, after all, that is the example that Jesus Christ has shown us: continually showing grace and forgiveness and kindness and compassion towards you and me, no matter how much we take his love for granted, no matter how poorly we treat him in return.

Do you want to leave a legacy that lasts? Then firstly, let your life be motivated by grace at all times.

**2. Consider the impact that your words have on others**

In verse 2 of this passage, Paul writes, “The things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses, entrust those things to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.”

That’s the way legacy works, isn’t it? Paul taught Timothy. Timothy taught others what Paul had taught him. Those other passed on the teaching and so it went down the generations. And here we are, 2000 years later, still talking about the legacy that Paul has left through his words and his writings.

How we use words is very important: once something has been said, it cannot be unsaid; the legacy has been created. We need to think very carefully before we speak.

The Bible has a lot to say about words and one of the most challenging parts is in the Letter of James, written by Jesus’ brother, when he talks about the tongue and how it shapes our speech, the words we say.

The tongue is a very small part of the body but it has great power. James compares it with a fire: one spark can cause devastation and utter ruin. James compares it with a bit in a horse’s mouth: controlling a wild beast and sending it in the right or wrong direction. James compares it with the rudder on a ship: though small, it can control a large ship and turn it in a good or bad direction.

How we choose to use the tongue, how we choose the word we speak, can either bring healing or hurt, can be positive or negative, can build up or break down. If you want to leave a good legacy, consider the words you use and the things you say.

There is a very wise saying attributed to the Buddha who said, “Before you speak, ask yourself this: Is what I am about to say helpful? Is what I am about to say true? If not, retain your silence”.

Is it helpful? Is it true? We could all learn a lot from that, I’m sure…

So, to leave a good legacy, first, consider the place of grace in your life. Second, consider the words you use towards others.

**3. Stay focused on your task in life**

It is so difficult to stay focused, isn’t it? Perhaps more so than ever before in history because the pull of social media and forms of communication are so strong. Apparently, there are 5 billion web pages out there: and when I am bored at work, or feeling distracted, I find it very easy to surf my way through as many of those as possible! Or check my mobile phone, or put something on my Instagram account or watch one of the 200 or so TV Channels available to me or watch a Netflix Movie or something…

Staying focused is extremely hard.

But staying focused is key to leaving a good legacy: decide what is important in life, focus on it, and work on it with all your being.

And, of course, nothing is more important, nothing requires greater focus, than our relationship with God. Our careers end when we retire – but our relationship with God is eternal. Our money and possessions will pass into the hands of others when we die - but our relationship with God is eternal.

Decide on the importance of that relationship, focus on it, and work at it.

In this letter to Timothy, Paul draws on 3 examples for us in this regard. Firstly, in verse 4, he compares our Christian life to that of a soldier on active service, attempting to please his commanding officer. Secondly, in verse 5, he compares our Christian life to that of an athlete in training, devoting hours, months and years to getting fit for a race or sporting event. Thirdly, in verse 6, he compares our Christian life to that of a farmer, putting in the hard work so that there will be a fruitful harvest. These are really good metaphors for us as we try to stay focused on our spiritual disciplines and our walk with God. And the more disciplined we are, the closer we walk with God and reflect his life to others, the greater our legacy will be.

So, consider the role of grace, consider your use of words, and stay focused.

And finally…

**4. Consider the need for wisdom**

In verse 7, Paul writes this: “Think about what I am saying, because the Lord will enable you to understand it all”.

Wisdom is not the same thing as knowledge. Wisdom the ability to know what to do with the knowledge you have - and that is a completely different thing.

We just need to look around us at world politics today, and the interaction of nation state with nation state. There are a lot of world leaders who have plenty of knowledge but completely lacking in wisdom. They misuse the knowledge they have, with terrible consequences for us all.

Wisdom is the completion of knowledge, if you like, and if we want to leave a good legacy behind us, then we need to use wisdom to know what to do with the knowledge that we have.

A wise person does not always act on their knowledge. A wise person does not always speak. A wise person knows when to speak and when to remain silent.

Acting out of wisdom is the key to leaving the greatest legacy of all…

So, no matter at what stage we are at in our lives, we need to think about our legacy. If we are in the later stages of life, if we are in mid-life, or even if we are just wanting to live our lives daily in such a way that we are a positive influence, making a difference in the world…the issue of legacy is profoundly important to us all.

Consider how you can fill your life with grace towards others.

Consider the words you are about to say before you speak.

Consider what is important and stay focused on it.

Consider how to be wise with the knowledge you have.

In these four ways, we will create a legacy that will have a hugely positive impact on others - a legacy that will outlive us all as it shapes the lives of those with whom we interact and they pass that legacy on to others for generations to come.

We can make a difference in the world. We can leave a wonderful legacy.

Let’s be sure to be mindful of what we say and how we act so that we can shape the world to be a better place.