

“A Celebration of Hope”
1 Corinthians 15:58 (50-57)
1/10/10

There are many things in life that we do that can be a waste of time. We must make the most of our days, not knowing what a day may bring, doing all for the sake of the Gospel, fully knowing that what we do for God is never a waste.

There are a lot of ways we measure success in this world. And I praise God everyday that as His servants we don't have to worry a single second about them.

How do we measure success?

Unfortunately Rob passed away earlier than we expected or would have liked. His death won't bring any major headlines. He didn't even want a funeral service.

And yet, as you and I have just witnessed this morning, here is a success story. Yes, our immediate human response to hearing of Rob's death might have been, “But we just built the house for him.”

And as God's people we say, “Yes! We did. Praise God for that and for the way it transformed Rob's life. Because you see, no matter how we measure success in this world, because of the power and greatness of our God:

Grace can never be wasted.

Oh, we may not see results, or results as we would prefer them to be. In Rob's case, he left us sooner than we would prefer. I wish he could have enjoyed his home much longer than he did.

But can we begin to measure the impact your work and generosity and love had upon his life? No matter what happens, never underestimate what God does through your work for Him.

1 Corinthians 15:58

We never work for the Lord in vain.

As much as it can pain us from time to time to experience, we simply will not ever truly know how God is working in a person's life. And to that end, how God uses what you do for the sake of the Gospel.

It is never in vain.

When we were in PA at Spring Creek we met Will and Teresa. Will and Teresa were living in Harrisburg in a one room hole-in-the-wall above a bar. They met and got to know someone from the church, and eventually the church felt called to help them out.

Will and Teresa had had a tough life. They made some bad choices to get where they were, I know Will had some problems with drug use. But they were in need of help and so we offered to give them a chance. Spring Creek's original meeting house is still in good shape, built in 1848, and was converted into a home many years ago that we used to house various folks through the years.

So one day a group of us gathered Will and Teresa's stuff and hauled it into the house. Someone from the church donated a brand new refrigerator. Shelley and I had a new stove we were not using and donated that. Others gave money. And so they were set up pretty well.

They began to attend Spring Creek. Since Shelley and I lived in the church parsonage, we were just 100 yards from Will and Teresa and spent many hours sitting and talking and working with them.

Things seemed to be going well, when one day we found something out. They had told us they were married, acted as if they were married, but it had been a lie. They were not married. Will had told me this and said that he was going to get his own place until they did get married.

I think they truly felt bad for lying to us. And we did see how the generosity of the church was affecting them in some positive ways. I many ways there were trying to do better.

Then one day, probably a few months later, Teresa called me up and told me Will had died. She said it was an allergic reaction to some medicine that stopped his heart.

Whatever it was, there were many reasons for us to think that all that time and energy and money spent was for nothing, just a waste. It's natural to feel that, to ask those questions of God—why after all this does it all end like this?

We do not know what a day may bring.

Whatever we do, it could be the last for us. And it can be the last for someone else as we serve. Does that mean we then do not act? By no means! That only means now is the time we must act.

We do not know what a day may bring, nor do we truly know how God is at work in this day, in us and through us for the sake of someone else.

Sometimes it can seem bleak, like we just wasted so much.

But I imagine that, at least for a couple days, even Jesus' disciples felt like that when Jesus hung and died on the cross.

I imagine many others who knew Jesus or heard about Jesus felt like His life was all for nothing to end in such a way.

But listen to these words from 1 Corinthians 15 that lead up to where we read this morning:

1 Corinthians 15:50-57

That is why Paul says in the Lord your labor is not in vain. Because even in death the is victory because of Christ. And to be a part of God's work in bringing that hope to others is an extraordinary privilege and blessing.

We are called to restore now.

We don't see the future.

I learned with Will back in PA that he had reconnected with his father like he hadn't in a long time. Will had reconnected with God in a way he hadn't in a long time.

There were results you saw with Rob.

He said himself how it changed him—gave him hope and dignity.

He was able to connect with Oakland's community.

Who knows what else God did with Rob in his heart—changes we could never know that were between him and God.

Rob said, "I watched how the grass was growing up all around me and taking over, and I was just waiting for the grass to take me too."

But then God showed up in the form of some folks building him and home.

And as Jon shared last week, the work you did for Rob impacted many others too.

We can never grow weary in doing good.

Galatians 6:9-10 says, "*So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all.*"

Isn't one day lived in the hope Rob was given better than 1000 more days without it?

I remember hearing a well known preacher say, this to a bunch of us preachers, “Don’t ever preach for results. You just prepare with all your heart what God lays on your heart and share it with all your heart. God will take care of the rest.”

What he meant was, don’t preach just so you see a crowd of people show up to hear you, but preach so that maybe God will change a life that day with the message He has for them, even though you may not even know it happened. You just do what you need to do.

That is what it’s all about for each of us.

Prepare with all your heart what God lays on your heart to do and then do it with all your heart.

Believe me, no actually, believe His Word when God says that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

In our world today, I can’t fully comprehend how many people are hurting and suffering. Not just that, but all the people out there who are the ones causing the hurt and suffering of others.

But rather than be discouraged by it all, it is a time to stand up and say “how can I do my part in making a difference, as small as it may seem.”

Because there is much to be done. And imagine if we all fully lived into that everyday what could be accomplished.

You know what can be accomplished by just a few of you here—building a brand new house—no, a new home—for someone who needed hope and a second chance. And by God’s grace you gave it to Rob. And now, more than any of us here in this place, Rob knows the truth of these words from Revelation:

“I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, ‘Look, God’s home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever.’”

Amen.