

All Saints' 11/5/23
1 John 3:1-3

THE REASON WHY THE WORLD DOES NOT KNOW US IS THAT IT DID NOT KNOW HIM.

"I (and then you insert your whole name) being of sound mind and body, do hereby bequeath to (and then you list who gets what)."

You don't have to be an attorney to recognize those words. Films and tv shows have taught us those are the words of one's last will and testament.

And, yet, history is filled with examples to make us question, not so much a person's body, but their minds. It seems bequests made in wills are often nothing more than an opportunity for a person to vent, get even, or even take revenge on a spouse, friend, or relative.

Take for example, the case of Leona Helmsley. Her will left \$12 million to her dog. As far as her grandchildren were concerned, some of them she cut out of her will entirely, the rest were ordered to pay an annual visit to their father's grave; that is, if they wanted to collect anything. Then there was the Michigan millionaire, Wellington Burt, who died in 1919. His will specified that nobody would get a penny until 21 years after his last grandchild died. In November of 2010, more than 90 years later, twelve people divided up Burt's \$110 million estate. And, we dare not forget the German poet Heinrich Heine who, in 1856, left his fortune to his wife, Mathilda. There was only one condition to her collecting the cash; Mathilda had to remarry so, as the poet put it "there will be at least one man to regret my death."

But in all of human history, perhaps no bequeath equals that of the Philadelphia woman who left her divorced husband one dollar to buy a rope to hang himself. I think that leaves little to the imagination as to how she truly felt about her former husband.

Oh, there have been some wonderful, thoughtful, loving bequests, as well. Like the comedian Jack Benny. Through their entire marriage, Jack had a rose delivered every single day to his wife. When he died in 1974, his wife, Mary, kept getting a rose from their florist. Finally, she paid the man a visit and said, "No more roses. Jack is gone." He replied, "Mrs. Benny, you don't understand. Your husband's will has given me enough money to insure you will get a red rose, every day, for the rest of your life."

Which brings me to ask you, Dear Child of God: Assuming that you are of sound mind in addition to a sound body, when you die, what will you leave behind and who will get what you leave behind?

I ask you that because today we observe All Saints'. We celebrate All Saints' to remember the great things God has done for the saints in Christ, but also the great things He did through the saints. No, we do not worship the saints, pray to them, or ask for their help and assistance in living a Christian life. But, we honor their memory and cherish their memory because they are examples of the great things God can do through His saints, and that leads us to follow them in all virtuous and godly living.

Which is why I ask you the simply, but profound question: What will you leave behind?

I think it's fair to say when you think "last will and testament," the first thing that pops into our mind is money, stuff. Think thoughts like: What do I do with my money? What do I get? We all want the north 40 and the mule; great-grandma's doolies. It's al

about stuff – earthly stuff. Maybe that’s not all bad. I think the point could be made for wise stewardship. And, [who did not get on their knees and thank God for the gift of a hot-water heater this past week; not to mention running water. Wise stewardship of the daily bread, for which Jesus Himself teaches us to pray.](#)

But, the problem is when we fear, love, and trust in our daily bread – our stuff – more than the Giver. How often do we find ourselves wanting “treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal,” even more than we want to be with Jesus in heaven (Mt 6:19).

once again I ask you, "What are you laying up? Is it just stuff

If you believe the most important things in life are things, you will have missed something pretty important.

Jesus once told a story about a rich man whose land produced a most bountiful harvest. The rich man thought his abundance meant he could live “happily ever after.” What the rich man didn't realize was that that very night, his soul would be required of him. Jesus closes the parable by asking, “*the things you have prepared, whose will they be*” (cf. Lk 12:13-21).

[Consider you witness to Jesus as your lasting legacy.](#)

Let me tell you about Patrick Henry. He’s the guy who signed the Declaration of Independence; the fellow who said, "Give me liberty or give me death." Let me tell you something you may not know about him. It is true Henry was a skilled orator and a wise and fearless statesman, but he was also a lousy business man. When he died in the year 1799, his family was not surprised when they read his will and found out he was completely broke. He was broke financially, but, his will still proudly said, "I have now disposed of all my property to my family. There is one thing more that I wish I could give them and that is faith in Jesus Christ. If they are given that and I do not give them one penny more, they are rich. If they do not have Jesus, and I had given them all the money in the world, they will continue to remain poor." Patrick Henry had the right idea. He knew what He was working for. He knew what He wanted to leave behind.

Clear and living witness to Jesus. He is the very Son of God who carried our sins to the cross ([forgiveness](#)), the Living Lord of Life who rose again the 3rd day ([life & immortality](#)), and He is our Good Shepherd whose rode and staff comforts us, goodness and mercy follows us all the days of our lives ... He will shepherd us to the green pastures and still waters where sorrows and tears are no more; where mourning and grief at ended and joy is all we know. What joy there will be for those who wait by our deathbeds if we have left them the assurance that Jesus was our Savior and the joy that all believers will be reunited before the throne of God that knows no parting. What will you leave behind? Give Jesus to those who come after you. If they have received Him, they will remember you well, and your life will be a success.

[Living witness: baptism, means of grace...](#)

There will come a time when your children and grandchildren will think back upon your memory and although they may cherish a piece or two of bric-a-brac or memorabilia, they will appreciate even more the gift of Jesus. He will be by their side to comfort them when you are lowered into your grave. He will watch over them when they go into the hospital. He will be helping them when they give birth to another generation. He will watch over those little children when the parents are too busy. Jesus is the One Person Who is all important, the One Person Who is necessary. Jesus is the Gift, the Inheritance Who, if we care for our loved ones, we need to share.

75th Anniversary:

Labor in the Lord was not in vain...

Although it is not strictly mandatory from a legal point of view, novels and films have taught us that a person's last Will and Testament really ought to begin with the words, "I (and then you insert your whole name) being of sound mind and body, do hereby bequeath to (and then you list who gets what). Now that phrase has always caused me a problem. Since many wills are written when a person's physical condition has deteriorated to the point where they expect the grim reaper to come calling any minute, how can they say they are in 'sound body.' So, rather than wondering, I went to one of my lawyer friends and asked him. He laughed and told me that the expression is not a medical one; it is merely a statement that the individual is capable of making the decisions which follow in the rest of the document.

Then he added, "From my own perspective on things, I believe you might be asking the wrong question. There's a lot of evidence which indicates it's not a person's body which ought to be questioned, it's their minds." Now that opened up a new can of worms. I asked for an explanation. He told me that the bequests made in wills are often a time for a person to vent, or get even, or take revenge on a spouse, friend, or relative. When I asked him to amplify, he said, "Well, there is the case of Leona Helmsley. Her will left \$12 million to her dog. As far as her grandchildren were concerned, some of them she cut out of her will entirely, the rest were ordered to pay an annual visit to their father's grave; that is if they wanted to collect anything." My friend continued. He told me about the Michigan millionaire, Wellington Burt who died in 1919. His will specified that nobody would get a penny until 21 years after his last grandchild died. In November of 2010, more than 90 years later, twelve people divided up Burt's \$110 million. My lawyer pal was just warming up. He told me about the German poet Heinrich Heine who, in 1856, left his fortune to his wife, Mathilda. There was only one condition to her collecting the cash; Mathilda had to remarry so, as the poet put it "there will be at least one man to regret my death."

When I asked my friend if anyone had ever made a good bequest, he had to think a bit. Then my friend mentioned Jack Benny, the comedian. Through their entire marriage Jack had a rose delivered daily to his wife. When he died in 1974, his wife, Mary, kept getting a rose from their florist. Finally she paid the man a visit and said, "No more roses. Jack is gone." He replied, "Mrs. Benny, you don't understand. Your husband's will has given me enough money to insure you will get a red rose, every day, for the rest of your life."

So, that pretty much sums up my lawyer friend's examples of what it means to be "of sound mind and body" when you're writing your will. And it gives me the opportunity to ask, "Since you are of sound mind and body, when you die, what will you leave behind and who will get what you leave behind?" Understand, I'm not trying to be nosy. I only ask the question, because our Savior, Jesus, asked it almost 2,000 years ago. True, He said it a little differently, but the intent is the same. Jesus asked the question after He had told the story of a very successful rich man whose harvests had guaranteed he would live 'happily ever after.' What the rich man didn't realize was 'happily ever after' gave him less than 24 hours. That's right, the man had a ton of dollars, but he had zero time left. That's when God asked him, as far as "the things you have prepared, whose will they be?"

That's the question I'm asking you, "Who is going to get what you leave behind?" Now you could reply, "Look, Pastor, after I'm gone it doesn't make much difference, does it?" And I suppose you're right, but that doesn't stop people from trying to make a last statement before they die.

What will you leave behind? A Philadelphia woman in her will instructed her executor to take one dollar from her estate, invest it, and pay the interest on this investment to her husband, "as evidence of my estimate of his worth." Another woman, also from Philadelphia, left her divorced husband one dollar to buy a rope to hang himself. These ladies knew what they were leaving behind and they knew how they wanted to be remembered.

Who will get what you leave behind? That's what Jesus asked. He asked it because He wanted us to realize the things we give to others after us should be of a spiritual level and not be limited to things. Jesus is promoting a truth which escaped a wealthy French industrialist who left his fortune to a leech. That's right a leech. Capitaine Furrer was disturbed by the greed and impatience of his heirs. To punish them he adopted a blood-sucking leech and made a will which gave the leech his fortune in coal mines and textile mills. The judge appointed a human lawyer to be the leech's guardian. You can see why Jesus wants to know, "Who will get what you leave behind?"

Dear friends, look around. Most of our TVs have numerous shopping channels which are on 24 hours-a-day, 7-days-a-week, 52-weeks-a-year. Look at the people who are running themselves ragged so they can earn enough money to drive the right car, have the newest cell phone, and live in a desirable neighborhood.

Yet, when all is said and done, who will get what they have laid up; who will inherit that for which they have suffered and bled? And if you don't want to answer that question, how about this one: "Shouldn't all this stuff we have; all the things we have accumulated provide us with a great degree of satisfaction?" You would think so, but it is not that way. Go to the best neighborhood in your town and you will find sadness, anger, hatred. You will see domestic problems and violence. Ask a realtor, "How many of these nice homes are on the market because the husband and wife are getting a divorce?"

And if you're wondering what the point of all this is, let me tell you. If you believe the most

important things in life are things, you will have missed something pretty important. Things just aren't enough. The great German Reformer, Martin Luther, often, not always, but often said many wise things. By the Holy Spirit's power he rediscovered the Scriptural truth: 'we are saved by God's grace and not by our own works.' But Luther also said, "I have held many things in my hands, and I have lost them all; but whatever I have placed in God's hands, that I still possess." Luther put things in their proper perspective. He knew people may give their children a lot of things, but if that is all they leave they are missing giving the one thing which is needful and that one thing is the Lord Jesus Christ. Now for a goodly part of this message you may have been chuckling to yourself and mumbling, "I don't have to worry about who's going to get my stuff because I really don't have any stuff to leave.

I hope you really don't believe that. If you do, let me tell you about Patrick Henry. I'm talking about the guy who signed the Declaration of Independence, the fellow who said, "Give me liberty or give me death." Now let me tell you something you may not know about him. It is true Henry was a skilled orator and a wise and fearless statesman, but he was also a lousy business man. When he died in the year 1799, his family was not surprised when they opened his will and found out he was completely broke. He was broke financially, but, and this is a big exception, his will still proudly said, "I have now disposed of all my property to my family. There is one thing more that I wish I could give them and that is faith in Jesus Christ. If they are given that and I do not give them one penny more, they are rich. If they do not have Jesus, and I had given them all the money in the world, they will continue to remain poor." Patrick Henry had the right idea. He knew what He was working for. He knew what He wanted to leave behind.

Jesus wondered, "Who will get what you have laid up?" So, once again I ask you, "What are you laying up? Is it just stuff?" If so, that is not enough. The day will come when the stuff will rot, the cars will rust, the house will decay, the bank accounts will be closed, the diamonds lost, and the stocks will become worthless paper. The day will come when those to whom you leave your stuff will no longer need it. The time will arrive when they will breathe their last and they will leave this world. On that day, even the most precious stuff you may have bequeathed them will be worthless.

My friends, there will come a time when your children and grandchildren will think back upon your memory and although they may cherish a piece or two of bric-a-brac or memorabilia, they will appreciate even more the gift of Jesus. He will be by their side to comfort them when you are lowered into your grave. He will watch over them when they go into the hospital. He will be helping them when they give birth to another generation. He will watch over those children when the parents are too busy. Jesus is the One Person Who is all important, the One Person Who is necessary. Jesus is the Gift, the Inheritance Who, if we care for our loved ones, we need to share.

Most of you who are listening to my voice today are of 'sound mind and body.' If so, I am glad. As I write this message, the stock market is up. To those of you of sound mind let me ask "What will it be tomorrow?" You don't know. You have your hopes, but you don't know. You might make an intelligent guess, but you don't know. Do you have a sound body? If so, good, but will your body be just as sound tomorrow? You hope so, but you don't know. Strokes, heart attacks, auto accidents, a fall down the stairs, a salad with tainted greens can, in a few seconds, make a sound body feel very sickly.

In this life things are such that what tomorrow brings will always be unknown. Indeed, the only thing which can be known with complete certainty is that God's Son, the Savior, Jesus Christ entered this world to move people from darkness into light; to give hope to those who were despondent and forgiveness to those whose souls were befouled by their transgressions. While the world is unpredictable, the Savior's promise to be with us can be counted on and trusted. No matter how many friends desert us, betray us, ignore us, or decide to become our enemies, Jesus remains steady, a Rock to comfort, support, and sustain.

And, when we have reached the end of our days and the physicians say they can "do no more", we shall have the assurance that Jesus will take care of us. The Living Lord of Life Who carried our sins to the cross will come to us and take us through the valleys where death casts its shadow and lead us to that place where sorrow and tears are no more; where mourning and grief are at an end and joy is part of all we do. What joy there will be for those who wait by our deathbeds if we have left them the assurance that Jesus was our Savior and all believers will be reunited again in a gathering which will never be spoiled by sin. What will you leave behind? Give Jesus to those who come after you. If they have received Him, they will remember you well, and your life will be a success.

Many years ago near Electra, Texas, an oil well was being dug. It was 180-feet deep and 12-inches in diameter. During the digging a child fell into the unprotected hole of the well. From the depths below, the child's piteous plea could be heard, "Daddy, get me out!" Rescuers tied ropes to the father's body and let him down into the narrow well, but to no good effect. Other efforts were made to rescue the child, but all ended in failure. Fainter and fainter the child's plea was heard, "Daddy, get me out! Daddy, get me out!" The cry finally ceased. Later, the lifeless form of the little child was brought to the surface. Strong men, who had been unable to rescue the child sat down and wept.

That is a sad story which touches our hearts. But you know, every day many a child is being lost in the well of sin. As in the case of the girl in Electra, Texas, it is often because someone was careless or not thinking. A fence could have saved that girl's life. It would have been enough but it was never put up. The little girl's suffering was tragic, but it didn't last for too long. But that is not so for those who are lost in the eternal hole of hell.

Every parent, every grandparent should know that Jesus, humankind's Savior, is the One Who can rescue us. We should know it, but tragically, too many parents and grandparents never give Jesus to their children. When parents bring children into the world and then fail to teach them to know God and Christ, they are digging a pit into which these children can fall and be lost. Many parents, by their example, are teaching their children that believing in the Savior is unimportant. Some parents never give their children a chance to know God's will. I pray no one within sound of my voice ever hears the cry echoing throughout eternity. "Daddy, mommy, get me out."

Instead, I pray that we try to make Christ the greatest inheritance we pass on to those after us. It is my prayer that having done so, in eternity, as we stand before Jesus' throne of grace and mercy, we will be surrounded by grateful children and grandchildren who will whisper into our ears the glorious and comforting words, "Mommy, Daddy, you left me what I needed to get in to

heaven." If that is the legacy you wish to give those who come after you and you need some help to do that, please call us at The Lutheran Hour. Amen.