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Prayer- Lord, pour out your Spirit upon us that we may dream dreams and catch new visions. And having seen a glimpse of your glory, pour us out as an offering, a sacrifice to share your good news and live fully in your care. Amen.

Wayne Meeks likens these late pastoral letters in the New Testament to a Leadership Manual for Ministers.ⁱ

And since we ordain deacons, elders, and Ministers of Word and Sacrament, these are words for that whole list of folks in our bulletin today which we call the “College of Deacons and Elders.”

But all baptized people of faith are ministers, so hear Paul's words and be encouraged.

Today Saint Paul is facing the end of his life, and he has a few last words. As we remember the saints who have lived and died in the faith, these seem fitting. As people who believe in the hope of the resurrection, we can face these kinds of endings for they always lead to new life.

Scripture: 2 Timothy 4:6-18

⁶As for me, I am already being poured out as a libation, and the time of my departure has come. ⁷I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

Personal Instructions

⁹Do your best to come to me soon, ¹⁰for Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens has gone to Galatia, ¹¹Titus to Dalmatia. ¹¹Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful in my ministry. ¹²I have sent Tychicus to Ephesus. ¹³When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments. ¹⁴Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will pay him back for his deeds. ¹⁵You also must beware of him, for he strongly opposed our message.

¹⁶At my first defense no one came to my support, but all deserted me. May it not be counted against them! ¹⁷But the Lord stood by me and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion’s mouth. ¹⁸The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and save me for his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Meditation

This time of year, I read lots of musings about fall with the changing colors, leaves fallin



Seriously though, the changing colors of the leaves, teach us something about letting go.

The mystic Rumi wrote, "Be like the trees and let the dead leaves drop."

Letting go of something, makes room for another thing or even the simplicity of less.

A recent *Guidepost*ⁱⁱ article suggested three things each of us can let go of:

1. Let go of stuff
2. Let go of caring what others think of us
3. Let go of unrealistic goals

Churches can let go of things: ministries which have lost purpose, empty traditions, or, as the person who has cleaned out church closets, all those potential craft supplies that no one ever uses.

Today we read the Apostle's Paul's Last Will and Testament of sorts.

Paul is imprisoned and awaiting trial.

Execution is near.

So, he takes out a piece of parchment and writes his final things to Timothy, his apprentice shepherding the church at Ephesus.

Joseph Campbell wrote, "We must be willing to let go of the life we have planned, so as to accept the life that is waiting for us."

Paul had surrendered his life to Christ after that blinding light knocked him on his back.

Daily dying and rising with Christ, Paul preached all over the ancient near east, is the call to take off and put to death the old self and to put on the new self, which is Christ!

So, no wonder that Paul would see his dying as a revelation of the power of God- a witness to glorify God.

Actually, Paul writes about his DEPARTURE- not his death.

He is departing, but there will be more to come...resurrection and eternal life.

That reminds me of the last words my father said to me before he died.

Lying on a gurney to go by ambulance to Charlotte Memorial Hospital, he did not say Goodbye, he said, "See you later."

And I know we will.

When we leave this place- we are departing. Death has lost its power. **Paul knew that his living and dying were in Christ Jesus.**

Today we remember those people who lived in God's love and died in God's love who were members of Fort Hill.

We also remember those who were born into a life of faith through God's claim on them in baptism.

Through the resurrection hope of Jesus Christ we celebrate that these friends who have departed have victory.

They are welcomed home to the finish line of their race,

And a crown like the laurel leaves of the Olympic runner will be placed upon their heads, except that it is God's righteousness. (actually justice (Greek *dikios*) is the literal translation, that awaits them.)

I read this list of members, and I those I know we recall today, and I think of that kind of victory.

But most of all, we know that they were beloved.

Loved by you and me, as part of our faith family.

In that scene of the movie Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, when Harry has died. They are in a heaven King's Cross train station as if ready to depart.

He walks with Dumbledore discussing the end of life. And Dumbledore says,

"Do not pity the dead, Harry. Pity the living. But above all- [pity] those who live without love."ⁱⁱⁱ

Grief especially has a way of sneaking up on us.

And we continue to grieve for a long time.

Pay attention to those moments and be gentle with one another, with yourself.

Christians are not death denying. We are truthful about the pain of loss.

But we also know the precious gift of life.

When we have lost those we love or even face our own mortality,

if anything, we appreciate the wondrous blessing and gift of life, of love, of those who matter to us.

We can gain the wisdom of perspective.

In the words of that song, we live like we are dying.

Rev. David Watermulder preached at Princeton Seminary in 1972 a sermon entitled "What Death Does to Life." Among many other memorable things, Watermulder preached,

"If we can affirm death as a part of life;

*if it is something to anticipate rather than something to dread,
something to complete rather than something to destroy;
then life becomes different.*

For death does fantastic things to life.

The person who doesn't want to face it can turn into a frantic fool or into a bitter, resentful person.

*The person who can affirm it and who can embrace death as a part of life,
is likely to live a life of victory and of triumph."*

Paul knew the victory of death in Jesus Christ, but he also knew that God had always been his strength.

God would not fail him.

Neither will God fail us. The Lord is our strength.

Originally those verse of the scripture where Paul mentions people by name were left out of the scheduled reading today.

But I wanted to include them, because they remind us that Paul was part of a community.

Some of those people let him down, and not only that, they abandoned and forsook him.

Others like good old Luke were faithful friends to Paul.

Oh, and Mark was useful.

And indeed they were- for they left two of the gospels which we read now.

Without them we would not know of God's redeeming love story.

And we would not know our part in God's story.

Paul did.

Paul knew that people, like that scoundrel Alexander, may let you down, but God will deal with them.

He even forgives and says, "May it not be counted against them."

"But the Lord stood by me," Paul writes, "and gave me strength."

For those of us facing difficult situations, or feel forsaken, like a failure or even lost, we can trust that truth.

The Lord will stand by us and give us strength.

Even strength to forgive and be the bigger person.

To be gracious and generous as God is generous.

One person who exemplified that generous grace to most of the world was Mother Teresa. She took people that society had thrown away and treated like discarded trash, and loved them with the love of Jesus.

There was a sign on the wall of Shishu Bhavan, the children's home in Calcutta. This is what the sign said:^{iv}

ANYWAY

People are unreasonable, illogical, and self-centered,

LOVE THEM ANYWAY

If you do good, people will accuse you of
selfish, ulterior motives,
DO GOOD ANYWAY
If you are successful,
you win false friends and true enemies,
SUCCEED ANYWAY
The good you do will be forgotten tomorrow,
DO GOOD ANYWAY
Honesty and frankness make you vulnerable,
BE HONEST AND FRANK ANYWAY
What you spent years building may be
destroyed overnight,
BUILD ANYWAY
People really need help
but may attack you if you help them,
HELP PEOPLE ANYWAY
Give the world the best you have
And you'll get kicked in the teeth,
GIVE THE WORLD THE BEST YOU'VE GOT ANYWAY.

That's victory!

We give thanks for Paul, a saint of our faith, and all those saints living and dead who do the righteous and just thing anyway.

We give thanks for saints, living and dead, who demonstrate for us God's loving and gracious will, who planted hope, built up neighbors, and glorified God with their words and their actions.

Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through Christ Jesus our Lord, our Light, our guide and our friend.

And all God's people say, "Amen."

ⁱ Wayne Meeks, ed. *The Writings of St. Paul* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1972).

ⁱⁱ Holly Rossi, "What Can You Let Go of this Fall?"

www.guideposts.org/better-living/positive-living/what-can-you-let-go-of-this-fall

ⁱⁱⁱ *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* scene <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VmVWuswEBSk&app=desktop>

^{iv} Lucinda Vardey, *Mother Teresa: A Simple Path* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1995), p. 185.