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Finishing Well
West Valley Presbyterian Church
Rev. Dr. Kim Engelmann

This year is the 60th anniversary of West Valley Presbyterian Church – and that is why on three Sundays – today, May....and June..., we are featuring two decades to remind us of where we came from and also where we are going. Today we are remembering those who were instrumental in building this church and making it thrive in the 50's and 60's...at the very beginning of WVPC

So far this has been a very rich and fun experience. These folks have seen a lot here at WVPC...they are some of our oldest members, and they are finishing their course here very well

It was a joy watching Greg Shaw and Nate making part of that video you just saw in my office. The fun in that room and the stories that were told were just wonderful. We had to edit out a lot of good stuff, so if something one of these folks said sparked your interest, go talk to them. They all have nametags on this morning and carnations and they are a wealth of marvelous information.

And I got to thinking how in our society we worship youth...not age. We have articles and websites about anti-aging gels and creams and supplements. We get to a certain age, and we don't want anyone to ask us how long we've been on this planet. Its a secret....But the Bible is really pro-aging...

For instance in Leviticus 19:32 it states...

Rise in the presence of the aged. Show respect for the elderly and revere your God. I am the Lord. (Leviticus 19:32)

The word elder is used in the Bible 175 times and particularly in the Old Testament it talks about how years can bring a maturity and a wisdom that others can learn from.

In other words those who have lived the longest can be mentors and guides to the young. That was the way the community of faith was supposed to work in Biblical times. I think sometimes the Asian community does a better job respecting the elderly than we do in other cultures today.

Now listen to this. Maybe you have never heard this scripture before. It is from Leviticus 27:1-2

If anyone makes a special vow to dedicate persons to the Lord by giving equivalent value, a special kind of sacrifice that was offered, let the amount be set of a male between the ages of twenty and sixty at fifty shekels of silver... If it is a person sixty years or more, set the value at fifteen shekels. (Leviticus 27:1-2, 7)

Thus, **the idea of a senior discount comes directly out of the Bible!**

You didn't know that.

It's right there in the text. If that isn't being pro-age I don't what is!

The Bible does not make a secret of people's ages.

Old age is viewed as a prize. It says of Abraham:

Abraham died at a good old age, an old man, full of years. (Genesis 25:8)

The older people got, the more respected they were. That's how it worked. Rabbis taught on this from an ancient commentary on the Book of Exodus. The Rabbi said:

How welcome is old age. The aged are beloved by God. (Exodus Rabbah 5:12)

We don't stand here as a church today because we just decided to show up this morning. We stand on a rich history made up of the hard work and efforts and prayers of those in our congregation who began the good work of WVPC years ago, who laid a firm foundation both Biblically and spiritually as well as building a literal foundation here... and this rich history is made up of people who want to see this continue.

There's Marvis and Don Eldridge founding members of this church organized in 1954 in a house. Then, in 1956 they broke ground for what we call today McHattie Hall which was the original place of worship – that was the sanctuary back then.

Then the ground breaking for this sanctuary was in 1965. Carroll McCune couldn't be interviewed – he was in charge of the building project - , but he told me that he built this sanctuary in such a way so that all the steps led to the cross – because he wanted this place to be centered on that sacrifice that Jesus made.

Marvis used to play the organ (pictures of that in the back) and Don – who also helped incredibly with the building – also is known for having the biggest heart and tirelessly helped people in need – the homeless, the hurting, the desperate – that's still our MO today.

I got to visit with Sterling and Melba Swanson this past week – Sterling (stand up) couldn't be in the video – but I found out that it

was Sterling who put together the organizational plans that the deacons now use.

He said he was concerned because nobody was visiting anyone (long ago in the 50's) so he said "I got out the map and I clustered people together in neighborhoods...I assigned deacons to specific areas and gave them people in those areas to care for"...these we call parishes..and it is that organizational structure that we still use to today.

When you go out and meet your deacon and get a strawberry this morning...that person is your deacon because you are in that persons geographic area – or parish – and its because of Sterling
Getting out the map

Organizing a system

And making it happen because he cared about people

Another story - Lorraine Mancebo (stand up) felt called to reach out to people and build relationships/ invite them to church. She had six children...I don't how she did this – found the time There's a picture of the entire family in the directory back there... be sure to take a peek when you go out. The children she had barely fit into the little square photo of the directory – they are all adorable of course...

And at first she didn't how to break the ice with folks who never went to church...but she said she figured it out.

What she did finally was to go up to people and say "*You know... would you like some vegetables... I have so many vegetables – way more than I need in my garden. Would you like some – I just don't know what to do with them all.*" She did that intentionally for years so that she could meet people and build relationships and then she'd invite people to church – and they'd come. She did a phenomenal job of outreach that way.

Amazing service and amazing dedication.

But the other thing about these folks that I learned just by talking with them for the past two weeks...is that they didn't give up on church when times were hard. They had a level of commitment and resilience that we've lost in our culture, that kept them serving and engaged and praying even when challenges came.

(As you heard), One slight challenge was that when the church was first built, several of our seniors told me that they couldn't even get in the door because of the mud that surrounded it.

We were in a big field back then that was so muddy someone said you'd actually sink down into the earth....So they would lay down planks of wood so people could walk in the door on Sundays... mud free

Another challenge was that people weren't particularly friendly here.

Again, Lorraine Mancebo told me that she came here for two years and no one talked to her. She told me that she came alone because Tom wasn't a Christian yet (can anybody here who knows Tom imagine Tom as not a Christian – I can't fathom what that looks like)– and she told me that actually, if it hadn't been for you Carrol, standing at the door and greeting her with that warmth and kindness that you still have today – she probably wouldn't have stayed. It was your warm greeting every morning that caused her to hang in there...and then eventually Tom met Jesus and started coming - we are so glad you did – So folks, don't ever underestimate the value of a warm greeting coming from a genuine heart.

It got me thinking, what if people came to church knowing that when they walked in those doors they would feel and know that

they were loved beyond their wildest imaginings- we couldn't hold back the crowds, folks if we demonstrated that kind of love. That's what church is meant to be. Unfortunately for the majority of people they feel judged when they walk into church. What if it was the opposite? What if we made that a goal one year...that everyone who walked into this place felt and knew and experience the extravagant love, the welcome of Jesus. And we prayed for that, and we learned how to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in doing that. Wouldn't that be awesome?

But there were harder challenges back then too that loomed larger than the mud or general unfriendliness..., some of these challenges involved pastors that were forced to leave, and politics that could have destroyed the church (just like now...right?); yet these folks didn't throw in the towel and say "*Ooops...this isn't meeting my needs. I am going somewhere else now.*" They didn't say..."*I'm going to vote with my feet because I disagree here, or don't like what they are doing over there.*"

No. These folks were committed. And they prayed, and they continued to serve with all of their hearts.

And they trusted God because they knew he would bring them through no matter what. As Paul Harkin said, "At the right time at a very difficult place...God brought us the right pastor back then – he was humble and unassuming - and who had one message and it was this – *love one another*. That message saved our church," he said. It was an answer to prayer.

Friends, today we stand on the broad shoulders of these folks and its because of *their* faith and *their* work and the fact that they didn't give up, that we can be the church we are today. No church survives the test of time without going through its challenges. And after you've lived awhile you learn that when you stand firm, and

you are faithful, and you pray without ceasing God comes through...every time.

These are the people that *I go to when I need prayer*. I know that these people love this church and love the Lord with all of their heart – they've invested themselves here – time talent and treasure. I also know that these folks don't get scared when challenges come. They just pray a little harder, do what they can, and wait on the Lord...

The thing that came through most frequently when we asked these folks about what inspired them most as they looked to the future of WVPC, was the energy and life they saw here. They love seeing the children, and the youth and the programming that is happening all over this place – and people being excited about service and about their faith. They feel that this energy will propel the church forward in a wonderful way to continue to share the gospel. It reminded me of this scripture...

Since my youth, God, You have taught me, and to this day I declare your marvelous deeds. Even when I am old and gray do not forsake me my God, until I declare your power to the next generation, your mighty acts to all who are to come. (Psalm 71:17-18)

To all those folks, let me tell you – its because of your efforts that the children had a children's sermon today and are in Sunday School right now hearing about the love of Jesus. A whole new generation coming up and learning about the Lord. Its because of your efforts that we have a thriving youth group and a houseboats program where every year at least two or three accept Jesus for the first time. A whole new generation needing Jesus and finding him here at WVPC.Thank you!

Take some time...hear the stories of these folks maybe after church today (carnations and nametags on) ...if you are a younger Bible Study or fellowship maybe you want to invite one of them to share with you in your group some insights and wisdom. Their perspective and resilience is something we all need to tap into while we can...

There's this poignant phrase in scripture as Jesus prepares to have his last supper with his disciples. Its in the gospel of John chapter 13:1 and it says this...

It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

Jesus finished well. He loved his quarrelsome, difficult, unenlightened, but good hearted, inquiring disciples to the end. He hung in there with them and loved them to the end.

It wasn't easy at that last supper to face the cross and leave his friends behind. Friends he had mentored and cared for and taught.

But Jesus knew that all that he had taught the disciples in word and example now lived in them. That's why he told them to remember...remember me...even when I'm gone...

Remember that I told you to love one another

Remember that no sacrifice is too great for the kingdom of God

Remember how I have tackled challenges, prayed hard, and remained faithful, and invested myself fully in what God wanted me to do

Remember how I have lived and who I have been

Learn from that, and go and do likewise.

May God grant us all the ability to be like Jesus; to be faithful
and finish well and be the church for the next generation.

Amen