

Soli Deo Gloria, Soli Deo Gracia, Soli Scriptura  
Agnus Dei, Qui Tollis Peccata Mundi  
Deo Volente

Sermon Preach at Stouffville United Church

by the Rev.Dr. John S. Niles

# Create a Legacy That Lasts

## Series: Once and for All

### Matthews 26:6-13

March 19, 2023

Three men were talking over coffee and one said, “What would you like people to say about you at your funeral? I would like people to say, ‘he lived a good life and loved his family.’” “Well” said the second, “I would like people to say, ‘He was a dedicated father and made a difference in the world.’” The third said, “I would like someone to say, ‘Look, he’s moving.’”

Every one of us creates our own legacy. This legacy impacts family and society in ways that are vast and far reaching. Each of us leaves a legacy that has not only emotional, but spiritual, familial, social, financial, physical, and vocational implications. It was no less true in Jesus’ time

It was only a few days before Jesus’ crucifixion. Mary came into the room carrying a treasure. Perhaps the only precious thing that she possessed, it was worth a year’s salary—at least \$30,000 by today’s standard. As she approached the door, I’m sure she was thinking, “Maybe I will just anoint his head. I don’t have to give it all to him. It cost me so much. But He has done so much for me. But how can I give him it all. I can’t, but then, she saw Him. And she fell at His feet, as she fully realization all that He has done for her. She broke the jar and anointed Jesus. An uproar occurred. Everyone was annoyed and shocked; everyone except Jesus. They were practical men. They knew the value of things. It hurt them to see good money simply going to waste. “What is the point of this waste?” Judas said. “This could have been sold and the money given to serve a good purpose. It could have been given to the poor at least. But this?! What a waste!” But was it? Certainly the apostles agreed with him. It is all very well to love Jesus, but one has to find a suitable way to express that love. One must be practical about such things.”

Yet, some how Jesus didn’t see it that way, He said, “Be quiet! She has done a lovely thing. And whenever and wherever the good news is preached it will be done in memory of her.”

Now, that is a funny thing to say. It certainly wasn’t practical thing to say. But the truth is that here we are 2000 years later speaking of her and what she did. What was so important about it? What is important in creating a legacy is that it deals with the fundamental problem of life. Where do you put your emphasis on giving or getting, blessing or hoarding?

## I

For us to understand this, we must move beyond what is **practical**.

Ralph Sockman used to tell of a conversation which he had with a man he met on a train. It was during the dirty thirties, and naturally the conversation turned to the economic problems of the day. The man he spoke to said “We are carrying too many non-producers. Our society is shot through with parasites—artists, musicians, writers ministers. Unless a person does something useful he has no right to live.”

His was a standard of dollars and cents. The only purpose is beans and business; the only reality is the material. Why the waste? As Judas would say; this could have been sold; and the truth is everything can be—just look on EBay—the world largest garage sale.

John J. Capman speaking at a dinner for Harvard school of Business Administration said, “that North America is a mill which turns everything into business; love, art, leisure, education—all are ground up into business packages and marketed as soon as nature produces a train of thought.” “It could have been sold” Unfortunately, so it can. And the more we think about it the more we find ourselves distrusting that train of thought. For is life only about beans and business? Is it only about what you can acquire?

When we think of it God certainly wasn't practical. Why did He put beauty in our world if all we need is bread? Of what possible purpose or use is a rose or a butterfly or a hummingbird? Sunshine is necessary for life, but what of those breath-taking sunsets? Surely that is God's extravagance. Rain is essential so that crops will grow, but what about the glory of the rainbow? Wheat we need, but why that golden ocean on our prairies.

These are the questions that the materialist like Judas must answer. Why these things there? And why does the sight of them make our souls soar. If we are only animals and if the physical is all that matters, why is there something within us which seeks beauty, truth and love? Why does great music stir us? Why do saintly lives inspire us? Why does love draw us?

Let us be practical some say. But God isn't practical; at least not as Judas would define it. Surely there is more to life than just beans and business. Surely there is more to life than just getting—but perhaps also giving.

I came across a poem that speaks of this not long ago it is entitled the Dash.

I read of a man who stood to speak at a funeral of a friend.  
He read the dates on his tomb stone from the beginning to the end  
First came the date of his birth and he read the following date with tears,  
But what matter most of all was the dash between those two years.  
For the dash represent all the time that he spent alive on this earth,  
And now only those that knew him and loved him know what the little line is worth.  
For it matters not how much we own the cars, the house, the cash;  
But what matters most of all is how we lived, and how we loved and how we spent that dash.

## II

Creating a legacy is more than just about what is practical. It is also about the **purpose**. What then is the purpose to life? Mary saw life differently than Judas. She thought of giving not getting. She was blessing not hoarding? She gave not the least she could, but the best. She gave a fragrant offering. She anointed Jesus for his death. To her there was no waste; for she had been given something far more valuable than this precious perfume. She did not think about being practical. She acted out of love and devotion.

A little boy spent all his hard earned saving son a gift for his mother for “mother’s day.’ He had worked all winter shovelling snow, and helping around the house. When this was done, he went and took all the money he had earned and bought \$40.00 dollar’s worth of roses. Now here is the question. If you were his mother what would you have said about how he used his savings?

How practical should love be? Where is the dividing line between waste and wisdom? When does a gift become too extravagant and becomes a waste?

I think men trend to have more problems with this at times. I remember ten years ago I was looking for a gift for my wife for our tenth anniversary. I thought that maybe I would go in and get her 2 dozen roses. That is until I saw the cost. It was going to cost at that florist \$95.00. I walked out for florist shop thinking to myself. Ninety-five dollars for flowers? All they are going to do is wilt and die? Just then I walked by a bank. I saw bonds were being sold. Then a crazy thought came into my mind. “Bond” With five dollars more I could get her a bond. Just think of the benefits. It will collect interest. It will grow and not diminish in value. It would be a good gift. Then I started to rehearse how I would present this most wonderful gift to my wife. I could just see her reaction, “You got me a what? You wanted to be what? Practical! **PRACTICAL, PRACTICAL.** I don’t want you to be practical. I want you to be passionate. Needless to say, I didn’t buy the bond. I took her to for a weekend to Niagara on the Lake.

We all want to live our lives in a way that will count in the lives of those we love and in the world as well. Mary lived life passionately and Judas lived practically. Which one really made a difference? Which one is correct? Is everything a waste that is not bread and butter, beans and business, does nothing count in this world except those things. Judas would think so.

The Jonathan Edwards and Max Jukes reveal the truth of this in stark reality. They lived extremely different lives. However, both influenced the lives of their family and community for generations. One was a believer the other an atheist. One was a giver the other taker.

Benjamin.B. Warfield, who was perhaps one of the most famous professors in the history of Princeton University researched the life of Jonathan Edwards and Max Jukes. He analysed 1,394 descendants of Jonathan Edwards and 1,200 descendants of Max Jukes.

Jonathan Edwards, who had been perhaps the greatest philosopher-theologian the world has every known became president of Princeton University in 1758.

Warfield discovered that of the over thirteen hundred descendants of Edwards

- 13 became college presidents
- 65 became college professors
- 30 became judges
- 100 became lawyers
- 60 became physicians
- 3 became United States senators

- 80 became ministers and public servants in various capacities

Warfield found in contrast that Max Jukes, who had been an atheist and looked to get materially whatever he wanted in what ever way he wanted by legal or illegal means found that he had

- 300 descendants who died as paupers
- 150 were criminals (including 7 murderers)
- 100 were alcoholics
- 50% of the female descendants became prostitutes
- 540 cost the state \$1.25 million

### III

Creating a legacy is more than just about what is practical. It is about being passionate about something. It is also about having a purpose and it is also about what is precious to Jesus. Why was it such an unforgettable act? It was because it was a blessing to Him. It was because it was an act of devotion and love. It was because it was not done out of need or greed, but out of love. It was done not to get something in return, but simply to give without the thought of a return. That is why Jesus said, “All of you be quiet. She understands. She gets it. She has done for me what I am going to do for you. And she will always be remembered for it.

Silly little boy to spend all his savings on a dozen roses—but what if, long after those petals have crumbled into dust, the mother still smiles and remembers the fragrance of that love. Silly woman to pour out her gift, but what if that gift helped the Savior of the world carry His cross just that much further. Then the gift would have leave a lasting legacy.

What is the measure of a meaningful and successful life? Is it only that which is practical?

I think Emerson said it best:

It is to laugh often and much; to win the respect of intelligent people and the affection of children; to earn the appreciation of honest critics and endure the betrayal of false friends. It is to leave this world just a little better then you found it, whether by a loving child, a good friend a garden patch a redeemed social condition; to know that even one life breathed easier because you lived. That is to have succeeded. You think about that. Amen.