

This sermon was presented by the pastor from a brief outline and not from written manuscript. It was transcribed from audiotape and edited by individuals other than the pastor who claims authorship. Said pastor did not necessarily read this transcript before publication.

Sermon dictionary entries are identified by footnotes in the document. Full dictionary entries are available in the complete on-line dictionary at <http://www.fpcnorfolk.org/dictionaryfpc.htm>

November 18, 2007

"Vuja De: It's déjà vu all over again: 'Running with the End in Mind'"

Rev. Jim Gates

We are concluding a sermon series this morning. The sermon series is called "Vuja De," or the ability to see things as they actually are, but we've basically been reading through the 1st and 2nd Letters of Paul to Timothy and so we are going to finish off 2nd Timothy this Sunday, but before we get there we're going to begin in the Book of Ruth. Ruth is a pretty familiar story for most of us. You recall that Ruth is the great-grandmother of David and she is in the lineage of Jesus; in the gospel of Matthew she is listed as one of four women who are named in that lineage. Ruth is actually a Moabite woman. She's not an Israelite and the story of Ruth begins not with Ruth but with Naomi and her husband. Naomi and her husband are Israelites and during a time of famine in Israel the couple leaves the Promised Land and moves to Moab. Moab is a neighboring country of Israel that is traditionally an enemy of Israel. If you remember the story of Balaam and the donkey that talked to him and the curses that Balaam tried to pronounce on Israel, that was Moab trying to do all of that stuff to Israel.

While they are in Moab, Naomi's husband dies. Naomi finds wives for her two sons and the wives are Moabite women. You may also remember that there is a prohibition that Israelites are not to intermarry with non-Israelites, especially Moabites. There's a rule about the descendants and when a descendant of a union between a Moabite and an Israelite can enter the assembly of God. Two interesting decisions by Naomi there. Finally, those sons die and Naomi is left just with her two daughters-in-law, these Moabite women. The crisis here for Ruth is not just a family crisis, it's an economic crisis. Women were not able to take care of themselves in any socially acceptable way in this day and time and so more or less they were cared for by their fathers, by their husbands, and or in their old age by their sons. We assume that because Naomi tells us she is old that she has no father to go home to. Her husband is dead; her sons are dead. Naomi really has really nothing left and her daughters-in-law are with her in a similar situation. We pick up the story in Ruth, chapter 1 verse 6.

Listen for the word of our Lord.

Old Testament Reading – Ruth 1: 6-18

Then she started to return with her daughters-in-law from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the country of Moab that the LORD had considered his people and given them food.

So she set out from the place where she had been living, she and her two daughters-in-law, and they went on their way to go back to the land of Judah.

But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back each of you to your mother's house. May the LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me.

The LORD grant that you may find security, each of you in the house of your husband." Then she kissed them, and they wept aloud.

They said to her, "No, we will return with you to your people."

But Naomi said, "Turn back, my daughters, why will you go with me? Do I still have sons in my womb that they may become your husbands?

Turn back, my daughters, go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. Even if I thought there was hope for me, even if I should have a husband tonight and bear sons,

would you then wait until they were grown? Would you then refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, it has been far more bitter for me than for you, because the hand of the LORD has turned against me."

Then they wept aloud again. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.

So she said, "See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law."

But Ruth said, "Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; Where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God.

Where you die, I will die— there will I be buried. May the LORD do thus and so to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you!"

When Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her.

In the New Testament we are in the very last chapter of Paul's second letter to Timothy, chapter 4. You recall that this is a letter that's written during a difficult time for Paul. We don't actually know an exact date but we are told that he is in prison. We also know that Paul seems to believe that he is near the end of his life, so often it's attributed to Paul's imprisonment in Rome. Paul is executed in Rome around 67 A. D. It's assumed that this is somewhere near the end of his life. What we do know is that 2nd Timothy is almost without question the last of Paul's letters that we have in the New Testament, so these are the final words of Paul recorded for us to read and you'll

notice that as he speaks there are similar themes that he's talked about in other letters but there's a different sense, there's sort of a sense of finality about it. In earlier letters Paul's talked about running a race. In Philippians he says, "I don't perceive that I've attained it, but I press forward to receive the prize in Christ Jesus."¹ Now Paul's going to say "I have finished the race. It's over. My work and my life has run its course." We have Paul in a moment in this passage sort of looking back over his life and assessing what he has done and what has happened. Then, he also gives his final encouragement to Timothy.

Hear these words of Paul from 2nd Timothy, chapter 4.

New Testament Reading – 2 Timothy 4

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I solemnly urge you:

proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching.

For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires,

and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths.

As for you, always be sober, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully.

As for me, I am already being poured out as a libation, and the time of my departure has come.

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

From 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.

Do your best to come to me soon,

for Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia.

Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful in my ministry.

I have sent Tychicus to Ephesus.

When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments.

Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will pay him back for his deeds.

You also must beware of him, for he strongly opposed our message.

At my first defense no one came to my support, but all deserted me. May it not be counted against them!

But 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.

The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and save me for his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus.

Erastus remained in Corinth; Trophimus I left ill in Miletus.

Do your best to come before winter. Eubulus sends greetings to you, as do Pudens and Linus and Claudia and all the brothers and sisters.

The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you.

I have a disclaimer to make before we get into the sermon. The disclaimer is this. Friday night I spent all night with our junior high and Lorie Skidmore and Anna Turton and Giehl King and we did a Laser Quest lock in, which was just awesome, but if at any time during the sermon I fall over asleep, or Giehl was working the slides a minute ago, if the slides go crazy, that's not our fault. It's just God catching up with us a little bit.

I remember when I was in middle school a book laying around my house. It was a book my mom was reading. It wasn't a unique thing for a book to be lying around my house, my mom was a reading teacher, so there were always books around, but this book stood out for some reason. It was called *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*.² It's pretty familiar to many of us. I remember seeing it on the table somewhere and thinking in all of my seventh grade wisdom and arrogance, "Geez, that's so sad that people have to read books to learn to be effective people 'cause I've already got it all together" (laughter). I remember my mom recommending it to me and me saying, "Well, there's no dragons and there's no spaceships, so it's probably not a book for me." So, there was some irony when I first came to First Pres two and a half years ago and our staff was reading books together and the first book that we were assigned was *7 Habits* (laughter), so I guess I am that sort of person who reads these sorts of books.

I found it to be really excellent and it's actually shaped my thought more than I realized. It keeps cropping up – not just the effective stuff, but just the way that he talks about the world and your life. I was working on my sermon title. I thought I had this really, creative, exciting thing "Running with the End in Mind." I thought I've got the running thing because Paul was talking about finishing the race and that's great scripture imagery that he uses, the "end in mind" because it's the end of Paul's life, and he's thinking about and looking back on his life. I thought I had this really cool idea and I actually went to Covey to find something unrelated and I realized that I

had totally stolen the idea from him (laughter). His second habit is “Begin with the End in Mind.”

Since I was plagiarizing his title I thought at least I ought to give him a quote in my sermon, so let me tell you what Covey says about beginning with the end in mind. “To begin with the end in mind means to start with a clear understanding of your destination. It means to know where you’re going so that you better understand where you are now and the steps that you are to take are always in the right direction. It’s incredibly easy to get caught up in an activity trap, in the busyness of life, to work harder and harder at climbing the ladder of success only to discover it’s leaning against the wrong wall. It is possible to be busy, very busy, without being very effective. People often find themselves achieving victories that are empty, successes that have come at the expense of things they suddenly realize were far more valuable to them. People from every walk of life often struggle to achieve a higher income, more recognition, or a certain degree of professional competence, only to find that their drive to achieve their goal blinded them to the things that really mattered most and are now gone. How different our lives are when we really know what is deeply important to us and keeping that picture in mind, we manage ourselves each day to be and to do what really matters most. If the ladder is not leaning against the right wall, every step we take just gets us to the wrong place faster. We may be very busy, we may be very efficient, but we are only truly effective when we begin with the end in mind.” Good stuff.

Covey talks about the distinction between the urgent and the important, and I love this. It’s probably very familiar to you. The urgent is the stuff that he just talked about, the activity trap that we get caught up in, the busyness of life. The urgent is stuff like, “I’ve got to get to my soccer game on time or this project for work is due tomorrow and I’ve got to have it done or I’ve got homework to do or the phone is ringing or I’ve got a million e-mails I need to answer or the baby’s crying and needs to be changed, etc., etc., etc. The urgent stuff is really the stuff that preoccupies so much of our time. Jim said once that busyness is the ultimate in self-absorption. It’s the busyness that kind of catches us up.

Contrast that with the important. The important is the stuff that we would say are our values. The important is probably going to be the same for most people in this room. If I asked you what your values were you’d probably say, “Family, friends, relationships, maybe bettering yourself, maybe bettering the world for your neighbor, justice, mercy.” Hopefully everyone in this room would say something about faithfulness to Christ Jesus. Those are our values. Those are the things that are important. We find all too often in our lives that the important stuff just gets crowded out by the urgent. Is this true for you? I find so often that I’m so busy with the urgent that the important stuff never even happens, and I imagine if someone looked at my life kind of from the outside and said, “What does Jim spend most of his time doing on a daily, or weekly, or monthly basis?” I imagine they would come up with a totally different list of things that are important than the list that I just gave you.

Let me give you an example. I have just one remaining grandparent, my mom’s mom. She is 98. She’ll be 99 on November 30th. Her name is Jesse but everybody calls her Brownie, I guess it’s because she makes good brownies? I don’t know where that came from. She’s always been Grandma Brownie. Grandma Brownie lives about four blocks from me – literally four blocks from me – and she is usually just a joy to be with. She has some Alzheimer’s symptoms. What that means is that I can tell the same stories over and over again and she never realizes and that’s great (laughter). It’s really something to me that’s really important, to spend time with my grandmother. I’ve got a Palm Pilot and every Monday at 4:30 p.m. and every Friday at 9:30 a.m. my Palm Pilot alarm goes off to remind me to go see my Grandma. I set those alarms because throughout this year my grandmother has been kind of in and out of the hospital periodically and

as she would come out of the hospital I would say, “Geez, I’ve got to get more focused on actually making time for Grandma.”

I’m going to let you guess how many of those Mondays and Fridays I’ve actually gone to visit my Grandma, and the reason that I’m going to let you guess is 'cause I’m guessing you’ll be more generous than the truth is. My grandmother is back in the hospital now. She’s been there for about three or four weeks. The first couple of weeks she was in the hospital I was really good about visiting and I was there probably two to four times a week just trying to be present. Then I got sick and I didn’t want to go because I was sick and then I was a little bit busy this week and with the lock-in and everything I didn’t go. It seems to me that that’s true on a pretty regular basis in my life, that stuff like that happens all the time. I allow, “Geez, I’ve got to get these e-mails answered,” or “Geez, I’ve got to finish this project for work” to edge out things like, “Geez, when am I going to see my grandmother?” Does that resonate with you guys?

I think that happens in such a huge variety of ways that it’s almost an overwhelming problem sometimes. What strikes me about this is that Paul was a man who was excellent at discerning the urgent from the important. Paul was a man who lived his life, really before and after his conversion, before his conversion he just had the wrong idea about what was important. He was a man who lived his life with passion about what he thought was important and the way I read Paul he unswervingly refused to allow the urgent stuff to encroach upon his life. Paul has this ability to look at the end and see what he wants his life to be about and then trace back everything from that point to say, “If Christ and His kingdom is the most important thing in my life, then everything that I do needs to be about Christ and His kingdom and the stuff that isn’t is stuff that I have to get rid of.” The exciting thing for me about Paul, the triumph for Paul, comes really in this passage in 2nd Timothy where he says these famous words. He looks back on his life and he says, “I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith.” What a blessing to be able to look over your life and say, “In every decision, in everything that I did, big, and small, I kept the faith. I fought the good fight, and now I have finished this race, and now I know that I face the next life with such extraordinary confidence that my life here has meaning even as I move on to the next life with Christ.”

There’s a great alternative to the story of Paul in one of Jesus’ parables. It’s the parable of the rich fool. It shows up in Luke, chapter 12. It may be familiar. The story is Jesus says that a man had a great harvest and he reaped more than he’d ever reaped before. This harvest was just big. And so, he had so much that actually he couldn’t keep it all for himself because he couldn’t fit it into his storehouses. Instead of being generous with what he’d been given, he decided to provide security for himself by building bigger storehouses, so he tears down his barns and he builds bigger barns. He puts everything he’s harvested into those bigger barns and then he says, “Great, now I can eat and drink and be merry and have a good life.” He has a dream that very night where he finishes that construction where God says, “You fool. Tonight your very life is demanded of you and all of that you’ve accumulated, what good will it do you?” It seems to me that we often get caught up in the busyness stuff or we even sometimes confuse what’s important with what’s not so that we are storing up for ourselves things that really just don’t matter very much.

I sort of have a soft spot for this rich, young fool guy. I don’t know if he was young, but he’s a rich fool. I have a soft spot for him because I don’t know that he was just a selfish guy. I don’t know that he was just a man that wanted everything for himself and hated poor people. This is probably a guy a lot like me. This is probably a guy who said, “Great. I’ve been blessed with abundance. If I save it, if I plan well, if I plan for my future well I can make sure that I and my family are taken care of. I can make sure that all of this work that I do is going to provide for me

into the future.” It’s not necessarily such a bad thing, right? What he misses is that the urgency of security and the urgency of providing for his family and the urgency of storing up what’s he’s been given totally overweighs the importance of being about the work of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ. If he was focused on the Kingdom of Jesus Christ he would have seen it as an opportunity for the Kingdom, but he was focused on the urgency of his own life, so he saw it as an opportunity for himself. Does that make sense? I think that we can get so caught up in the urgency of our own life that sometimes we miss the importance of the Kingdom.

As we think about the end of our life, I want to be clear that there is something more at stake than our salvation or, rather, salvation as we usually think of it. Paul has this great piece if one of his letters to the Corinthians where he says that when you die you’ll pass through a fire.³ If you are a Christian, you will pass through the fire on the foundation of Jesus Christ and that’s a good thing. Better to go through the fire than get burned up, right? But he says, that if your life has been meaningful then you will build on that foundation with gold and silver and precious stones and you’ll take that foundation with you, but if you are living a life that’s focused on yourself - even if you have faith in Christ Jesus, you’re still going to be saved, that’s not a stake – but you’ve built a foundation of straw and of hay and when you pass through the fire that will be burned up and you’ll make it through, but just barely. This is the idea that the stuff that we do now can either have eternal significance or not, it can be something that we can take with us or not, it can be something that changes lives now and in eternity or not. This idea that we are saved is more than we’re saved from sin and death. We will be part of the Kingdom that Jesus started that Paul says in his letter to Timothy will be concluded at His appearing. This is the promise for us.

There is a guy named Brian McLaren⁴ who says that if you asked Paul if he was going to heaven when he died Paul probably would have said, “yes,” but he would have looked at you funny because for Paul that question would totally miss the point. It’s not about where you go when you die; it’s about who you’re becoming right now. As C. S. Lewis⁵ says, “You’re always becoming who you’ll always be.” So, how are we able to participate in this important stuff, this Kingdom stuff? How do we change our lives from the urgent to the important?

First, I just want to say that it’s really hard. I want to say that the urgent stuff is really hard to get away from. I think the story of Naomi is the story of someone who really had difficulty escaping the urgent. I have a lot of sympathy for Naomi and she certainly had a very difficult life, but she makes a couple of decisions just in the first six verses of the story of Ruth that are a little questionable for me. The first one is that she decides to leave the Promised Land and go to Moab. There is a famine in the Promised Land and eating is a sort of urgent thing. Usually around about 11:30 on a Sunday morning I am feeling the urgency of eating pretty strongly (laughter), but the urgency of the famine for her totally overwhelmed the fact that she had been called by God to this land, that this was a covenant that God had established between her people and Himself, that this was literally the Promised Land. Why did she think somewhere else would be better? If there is no food in the land flowing with milk and honey, why would you leave and go somewhere else? She makes that decision.

Then she decides to marry her children, her sons, to Moabite women. Again, this is a pretty important thing. They need to start building families and who doesn’t want their children to be happily married? She needs someplace to be taken care of because her husband has died. She needs her sons to be building their own families so that one day she can move in and live with them and be provided for. That’s a pretty urgent thing and arguably important, but she forgets the command of God. She forgets the promise of God that she and hers are to be a holy people set apart from all of the other nations of the world, to be an example. Part of that holiness was that

they were not to intermarry. Naomi seems to wrestle with the urgent and the important and she seems to come down repeatedly on the side of the urgent.

I'm a little nervous and a little bit excited about this. It's going to be pretty familiar I think. I'm going to show a video from one of my favorite movies, probably my favorite movie. I just want to say that if it's not your favorite movie please don't stop listening to me after the clip. If it is your favorite movie please don't start imagining what happens next in the movie and stop listening to me after the clip. This is a clip from *The Empire Strikes Back*. Luke is the Jedi hopeful, really in a lot of ways the hope for the whole galaxy in this battle against Darth Vader and evil. Luke is sent to Yoda for this training. In the midst of this training he has a vision of the future where his friends are threatened, and Yoda says perhaps they are even going to die. Luke says, "I should go and save them," and Yoda says, "No, you really should stay and finish your training because that's the more important thing. The clip is the end of that conversation.

Yoda: Luke, you must complete the training.

Luke: I can't keep the vision out of my head. They're my friends. I've got to help them.

Yoda: You must not go.

Luke: But Han and Leia will die if I don't.

Obi-Wan: You don't know that. Even Yoda cannot see their fate.

Luke: But I can help them. I feel the Force.

Obi-Wan: But you cannot control it. This is a dangerous time for you when you will be tempted by the dark side of the Force.

Yoda: Yes, yes. To Obi Wan you listen. The cave. Remember your failure at the cave.

Luke: But I've learned so much since then. Master Yoda, I promise to return and finish what I've begun. You have my word.

Obi-Wan: It is you and your abilities the Emperor wants. That is why your friends are made to suffer.

Luke: That's why I have to go.

Obi-Wan: Luke, I don't want to lose you to the Emperor the way I lost Vader.

Luke: You won't.

Yoda: Stopped they must be; on this all depends. Only a full trained Jedi knight with the Force as his ally will conquer Vader and his Emperor. If you end your training now, if you choose the quick and easy path as Vader did, you will become an agent of evil.

Obi-Wan: Patience.

Luke: And sacrifice Han and Leia?

Yoda: If you honor what they fight for, yes.

Obi-Wan: If you choose to face Vader you will do it alone. I cannot interfere.

Luke: I understand. R2, fire up the converters.

Obi-Wan: Luke, don't give in to hate. That leads to the Dark Side.

Yoda: Strong is Vader. Mind what you have learned. Save you it can.

Luke: I will and I'll return. I promise.

Yoda: Told you I did. Reckless is he. Now matters are worse.

Obi-Wan: That boy is our last hope.

Yoda: No. There is another.

Great. Who's going to go home and watch the rest of that movie (laughter)? I realize that I'm a huge dork (laughter), but I actually think there is a lot of powerful stuff going on there. I think that that decision that Yoda tells Luke to make, that he doesn't make you'll note, that decision to choose to allow his friends to die for the sake of something more important is a huge thing. I'm fully aware that most of the decisions that we make between the urgent and the important are not that difficult, and I am aware that most of the decisions we make between the urgent and the

important are about where we're going to spend our money or our time or our energy and most of those decisions just don't have those ramifications, but I do think that most of our decisions have cosmic significance. Even the little stuff has cosmic significance. Even the little stuff matters because it defines who we are becoming, what sort of people we are, what do we really think is important in our life, and how do we live that out or not.

I believe that every time we have to choose between the urgent and the important it costs us something. There is a lot of power in the urgent. It has sort of a mastery over us sometimes. I think one of those reasons is a lot of times it's just logical. It's logical for Naomi to leave when there's a famine; it's logical for Naomi to have daughters for her sons to marry. A lot of times the urgent stuff just seems almost inevitable, but it's not, it's really not. The way that I know it's not is because Scripture is full of the witness of people who have lived their lives in defiance of those urgent things. I think Ruth is a great example. I think Ruth is a woman who is able to see the important in her life, to see the end literally where she wants to be. She even talks about it here, where she wants to die. In light of where she wants to be and how she wants to die she is able to look back and interpret her whole life through that lens. She is able to say, "You know what, even though all of the logic in the world tells me to go back and spend time in my father's house, where they'll take care of me, where I can get remarried, where I can have a productive life, and have children, all of the logic agrees with you Naomi, but don't press me to leave you or turn back from following you because where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people and your God, my God." The Hebrew here is really interesting. There's no future sense in it – it just says your people, my people, your God, my God, like it's not going to happen, it's already true for me. Already your people are my people and already your God is my God. It is interesting that she even swears by the name of the Lord not of Chemosh, the God of the Moabites. "May the Lord do thus and so to me and more as well, even if death parts me from you." Ruth knows who she wants to become. She knows what sort of person she wants to end up as and she is able to make the difficult decisions of rejecting those things that seem urgent so that she can follow those things that are more important.

Sometimes those decisions of urgent versus important are just smaller things, but like I said I think they are just as powerful, just as difficult. I was talking with one of the guys in one of my small groups. I'm actually in two small groups; one of them is high school guys' small group. I was talking with one of the guys in that small group. He's a junior and he was saying that he's been in a sports team or on a sports program for every season of sports since he was in fifth grade. He decided this year to not do basketball again, that he was going to take a season off because he just didn't think it was good for him. He thought he had better things he could do with that time. The pressing urgency of college applications and the knowledge that he is going to be graded literally on how he's lived his life, graded on what school he'll get in to, graded on what name brand he gets to cite on resumes from now until whenever – that's a sense of urgency that's hard to escape. We were talking. He was just saying, "You know I've made the decision, but it was a really hard decision to decide not to do this this year because I'm concerned about how it's going to look for my future, and I'm concerned how it's going to look on my college applications, but it was the right decision. I needed to pick this thing that was more important."

There's a young man named Brandon who I believe was on Wavy TV 10 recently, but I know about him because somebody in my adult small group has been praying for him on a regular basis. Brandon is a twelve-year old boy. He has severe, severe disabilities. He lives at St. Mary's Home for Disabled Children and Brandon is from all accounts I've heard is just a wonderful young man. One of the people in our small group, Jennifer Reasor, works at St. Mary's and helps care for Brandon, and she's been bringing us stories throughout the last year about Brandon communicates by looking up or down to say "yes" or "no." She'll come to the

small group and she'll say we had these great conversations and we'll say, "How" because you're the only one who is able to talk but apparently they do. Jennifer and two of her coworkers took Brandon this weekend to Virginia Tech because Brandon is a huge Virginia Tech football fan. The reason I know about it was because, Cline, Jennifer's husband, e-mailed our small group. There was an article on the Virginia Tech website that talked about what they were doing. The game was sold out and so they had to get special permission to add seating for Brandon and these three folks, Jennifer and two other folks that were caring for him. It just strikes me all of the stuff that I do with my weekends and all of the stuff that I do with my free time which I think is so precious, a lot of that stuff isn't very important. The significance of taking this young boy who really can't take care of himself in any significant fashion and allowing him to go to a Virginia Tech football game and fulfill this dream that he had, that's a powerful thing for me.

What's even more powerful for me is just thinking about folks who work at St. Mary's on a regular basis and all of the stuff that they do for those children and the incredible emotional stress it must be to be with children with such disabilities all the time. It's not just getting to fulfill dreams for kids, but it's emptying kid's bed pans and washing kids who can't wash themselves. It's learning to communicate with children who are completely unable to write or speak. I just think about what an overwhelming situation that would be with these children that it seems like God has abandoned, these children that it seems like God just forgot about,. I imagine that a lot of those people that work there could find better paying jobs, and I imagine a lot of people could find jobs that didn't bring that incredible emotional stress and imagine they could find jobs that didn't require them to use up their weekends to take kids to Virginia Tech football games, but I can't imagine that they could find a job that would be any more important. I can't imagine that they would find a job that would be anymore about the work of Christ's Kingdom in this world than caring for those children, because the way that I know that Christ hasn't abandoned them is because they are there every day caring for those children in the name of Jesus Christ. I imagine when they look back on their lives and they think about what they've done that they won't have any question in being able to say that they've run the race and finished it and fought the good fight and kept the faith. I have no question that when they look back they can look back on their whole life with a sense of pride and a knowledge that what they've done in this life has eternal significance.

The question I guess for us this morning is when we look back on our lives what do we want to see? What sort of decisions do we want to have made? If we want our end to be with Christ and the fulfillment of His Kingdom, what does that mean that we have to do today? Do we want to look back and see that we were people who left the Promised Land and forgot about the covenant of our ancestors, or do we want to look back and see that we were people who redeemed the lineage of kings, the very lineage of the Messiah by our extraordinary faithfulness? Do we want to look back and say, "I had a perfect college application and I did every thing I ever needed to do to get the things on that application that those people would think was significant?" or do we want to look back and say, "I lived my life in a way that I know was significant for me and for my Heavenly Father, and whether somebody on an application realizes that or not isn't that important?" Do we want to look back and say, whether your child is in pre-school or in high school, that I helped my child get to every event and do everything that they ever wanted to do or do we want to look back and say that my child became a man or a woman that wants to do the things that Christ's Kingdom is about in this world.

I have a challenge for you this week and the challenge is for me as well. The challenge is this. Two things. The first thing is to find one urgent thing in your life. You know what the urgent things in your life are infinitely better than I could ever describe them to you. Find one urgent thing in your life and don't do it this week. Here's the catch. You can't just say, "I was so busy

with everything else that was urgent that I didn't get to this thing, so Jim this is what I didn't do." That's not fair. I want you to pick one thing in your life that you know is urgent, I don't care if it's not answering the phone so you can have 20 minutes of quiet time or if it's not doing something for work or for school because you simply can't fit that in. You need to learn to not always fit that into your day. Whatever it is, I want you to take one thing and not do it for the sole reason that you want to affirm that that sort of thing doesn't have mastery over your life. I want you to not do it only so you can say, "I don't have to do that every day if that's not what Christ calls me to do."

The second thing I want you to do is I want you to find one thing that you know is important. You know it and again you know what those things are as well or better than I do. Find one thing that is important in your life and force yourself to make it a part of your week this week. Don't take the excuse, "I was just too busy to get it done." That's the problem, not the answer. The answer is "Make yourself do it." I know what I'm doing. After the 11:00 service I'm going over to the hospital and seeing my grandmother. What are you going to do this week? You know what's important. What are you going to do this week to make that a part of your life? I think if you do that every week, if every week you kill something urgent and you resurrect something important, then we can start becoming those sort of people, those people like Ruth, those people like Paul, those people who can look back at our life in the conclusion of our years, whatever that might be, and say, "Wow, I really did something of eternal significance and I fought the good fight, and I finished the race, and I kept the faith, and now stored up for me is the crown of righteousness that the Lord will give." I think that if we can live lives like that that we will so transform this world that it will be unrecognizable from the state that it is today. Maybe so.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Sermon Dictionary Notes:

¹ Philippians 3:12-14.

² *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* – written by Stephen Covey and first published in 1990.

³ 1 Corinthians 3

⁴ Brian McLaren – speaker, pastor, and author of books including *The Church on the Other Side: Doing Ministry in the Postmodern Matrix*, *A New Kind of Christian*, and *A Generous Orthodoxy*.

⁵ C. S. Lewis - Irish scholar and author who was a member of the faculty of Oxford and wrote academic works as well as books on religious topics and popular novels. Works include *Mere Christianity*, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, and *Surprised by Joy*.