

“One generation shall praise thy works to another.” Psalm 145:4

Introduction

This is a psalm of praise to God the King. It opens with the recognition of God’s might and majesty and moves to tribute God’s mercy and faithfulness, focusing between the poles of God’s holiness and God’s love.

In today’s times, we tend to emphasize the attribute of God’s holiness rather than God’s love. The baby boomer generation, in particular, places their concern on “what religion can do for me.” In fact, many people today have adopted a consumer attitude toward faith- they “shop around” for that which gives them the most, usually at the least cost. These “consumer” attitudes need to be addressed when presenting ideas about God’s holiness, God’s majesty, and God’s authority and rule.

Yet it is the recognition of God as King, or God as holy, which leads us to praise. And praise grows only out of a faith that has fallen on its knees. When God becomes nothing more than a “heavenly pal,” or “my co-pilot,” there is little ground for praise. In religion, as in the rest of life, familiarity breeds contempt; thus religion becomes more like a relationship between equals. William Temple once said, “The proper outline for Christian prayer is not ‘Please do for me what I want.’ It is ‘Please do with me what you want.’”

Praise leads to action

In Verse 4, the psalmist indicates that praise is to be intergenerational, passed on from one generation to the next. Martin Luther said that it is strange that every twenty years or so God builds a new church out of little children. Which is another way of saying that the Church is always just one generation away from extinction. The Christian faith must be transmitted or it will die. The whole thrust of education within the Church is to ensure the continuation of the faith.

But sometimes we only pay lip service to this idea. Lyle Schaller had identified what he has called the “grandmother” syndrome in the Church. We want to have a lot of children around, yet are relieved that the responsibility for their care belongs to someone else. But unless one generation praises God’s works to another, faith will be lost forever.

Transmit faith by works & words

Of particular importance for Wills Emphasis is the idea that we can pass our faith on to the next generation. This we can do not only by our teaching, but by the use of our resources. By remembering the Church in our wills, by providing even after our death for funds to be available for ministries or missions which were important to use in life, we can help continue those things that make for faith. We cannot teach the next generation after our death, but we can make the means available for others to continue teaching. This is a particularly crucial moment in time for stressing the opportunities that exist through expression of our Christian commitment in our wills. It has been estimated that in the next ten years will be the largest intergenerational transfer of funds in American history. It is likely that at least two hundred billion of these dollars will be transferred within Presbyterian families. Add to this the fact that this generation is possibly the last one with a strong sense of “Presbyterian identity, of denominational loyalty,” and it creates a moment of unique opportunity.

Your sermon can confront people with the challenge of using their accumulated resources to carry on to the next generation the faith that has meant so much to them. Consider the cartoon which showed two men discussing a third man who had just died. One asked, “How much did he leave?” The other replied, “Everything.” People are going to leave everything. The question is where. It is our job to remind them of the possibility of leaving some of it to pass on their faith to the next generation.

In his will, the American patriot Patrick Henry wrote, “I have now disposed of all my property to my family; there is one thing more I wish I could give them, and that is the Christian religion. If they had this, and I had not given them one shilling, they would be rich; but if they had not that, and I have given them all the world, they would be poor.” We can give our faith. One generation can praise God’s works to another. Our wills can be a means of sharing our faith.