

# FOREVER YOUNG

## Sermon, October 22, 2017

### Christian Education Sunday

#### Text: Exodus 33:12-23

While reuniting with many friends (*some I've known almost my entire life*) at my class reunion in Pennsylvania a few weeks ago, a C.S. Lewis quote came to mind, one I included in the March 2005 edition of the **Fishermen's News**: *"We are so little reconciled to time that we are even astonished at it. 'How he's grown!' we exclaim, 'How time flies!' as though the universal form of our experience were again and again a novelty. It is as strange as if a fish were repeatedly surprised at the wetness of the water. And that would be strange indeed ... unless, of course, the fish were destined to become, one day, a land animal."*

As natural as the passage of time should be to us, we are again and again surprised at its swift passage, as if the passage of time was some sort of novelty. I can still remember rolling my eyes years ago when I would hear "old" people say, *"How time flies! Where did the years go?"* But trust me on this, especially if you are, oh, under 25. You'll be saying those things yourself before you know it; the years really do fly by faster and faster. It really is a universal human feeling, especially as we reach middle age and older. To C.S. Lewis, this is as strange as a fish being surprised at the wetness of water, unless, of course, the fish was destined to live elsewhere, in another environment. Time is a repeated "novelty" to us because this temporal world is not our real "home." The next time the passage of time strikes any of you as odd or unnatural, let it serve as a wonderful reminder that you are a being created for eternity; the reason we feel this "strangeness" about time is that we are destined to live forever ... because we are made in the image of a God who is forever young. Now, hold that thought a minute.

Last week I highlighted an excellent commencement address given last June by Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts at the Cardigan Mountain School, a New Hampshire boarding school for boys; his son was in the graduating class. You can find copies of that sermon in the narthex or online,<sup>1</sup> but this morning I want to add his closing words: *"These lyrics are from the great American philosopher ... Bob Dylan. They're almost fifty years old. He wrote them for his son, Jesse, who he was missing while he was on tour. It lists the hopes that a parent might have for a son and for a daughter. They're also good goals for a son and a daughter (and, I might add on this Christian Education Sunday, good goals for our Sunday School students - - slc). The wishes are beautiful, they're timeless. They're universal. They're good and true, except for one: It is the wish that gives the song its title and its refrain. That wish is a parent's lament. It's not a good wish. So these are the lyrics from **Forever Young** by Bob Dylan:*

*May God bless you and keep you always; May your wishes all come true; May you always do for others, and let others do for you. May you build a ladder to the stars, and climb on every rung ... and may you stay forever young.*

*May you grow up to be righteous; may you grow up to be true. May you always know the truth and see the lights surrounding you. May you always be courageous, stand upright and be strong ... and may you stay forever young.*

*May your hands always be busy; may your feet always be swift. May you have a strong foundation when the winds of changes shift. May your heart always be joyful; may your song always be sung ... and may you stay forever young."*

It is a great song, also sung by Pete Seeger back in the sixties. Rod Stewart did a popular revision/remake in 1988 which I really enjoyed (*he slightly changed the lyrics, but kept the same general themes; it was one of just two Rod Stewart songs that I actually liked ... the other was "Sailing" ... as I thought most of Rod Stewart's songs were fit for a Harvey Weinstein playlist, but I digress*). Mel Gibson starred in a movie by the same name in 1992; **Forever Young** was panned by the critics but loved by the audiences ... a wonderfully charming, romantic, endearing and inspiring tale that I thoroughly enjoyed.

Now Chief Justice Roberts views that one wish as a parent's lament, that it's not a good thing, that it's a selfish wish, to wish a child to be forever young. On one hand, as a parent, I get that ... as alluded earlier, those fleeting young years of childhood just fly by all so quickly. Many of us parents look at the Majieka family sitting here in the front row with four beautiful and charming young children and we are lovingly envious, we wax nostalgic about those times we could hold our children in our arms. But on the other hand, I respectfully disagree with Justice Roberts. It really is a *good* thing to wish someone to be forever young. Because again, we are made in the image of a God Who is forever young, and to wish our loved ones to be like God is a really good thing to wish! In fact, the Bible promises that through faith in Christ one day we shall be like Him, when we see Him face to face. As C.S. Lewis intimated, we are destined, created for, eternity. We are made in the image of a God who does not age!

I've mentioned this before in years past, but sometimes people think of God as being somehow old, ancient, a thin-lipped, stern deity who just has no patience with the foibles of His children. That's partly understandable; after all, the Bible does refer to God as the Ancient of Days. But we have to understand that although we age, God does not! God doesn't grow old, God doesn't get sick, God never grows cynical or grouchy, God doesn't worry, God is never forgetful ... except when He intentionally chooses to forget, as in the case of our forgiven sins. He is the

<sup>1</sup> See <https://greenwoodchurch.files.wordpress.com/2017/10/gold-plated-religious-nonsense.pdf>

For a full text of Justice Roberts address, see <http://time.com/4845150/chief-justice-john-roberts-commencement-speech-transcript/>

same today, yesterday and forever. G.K. Chesterton wrote, "*We have sinned and grown old, [but] our Father is younger than we.*"<sup>2</sup> God has all the exuberance, joy, energy and buoyant vigor of eternal youth; He is forever young.

Thirty-three years ago yesterday I was formally ordained to the ministry. For ten years prior to that, I was engaged in some type of ministry or another with the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, Young Life, church youth groups, a summer internship with a Methodist church, three years as a Director of Christian Education in a Baptist church in my home town, two years as part time youth director in a PC(USA) church down the road from my seminary ... that's well over four decades of ministry. I'm aging, I know. And I've changed and mellowed in many ways over those years, but in some areas I've become all the more rooted and stubborn, and especially in this: If I've learned nothing else in forty-three years of ministry, I've learned that we will never understand God until we get it through our heads that our eternally young God is the most delightfully joyous being in the universe! God did not create the world in order to judge it, or in order to dominate it, or in order to make it obey the dictates of His will. God made the world to **delight** in it, He made this world and all that is in it (*including all WHO are in it*) to share in His overflowing joy and love; and He absolutely delights when we discover the delight of His good ways. Elsewhere in the Bible, God refers to Himself as a husband to His people ... well, He certainly is not some domineering control freak of a husband Who neurotically *needs* to be loved, Who constantly demands proof of love and loyalty because of His insecurities. That kind of husband knows next to nothing about genuine love. No, God is a genuinely secure lover Who wishes to share His joy, Who wishes to lavish love *on* and share blessings *with* His beloved. **Joy** is of the essence of God's character, and joy is, ultimately, the eternal destiny of this universe He created.

Of course, God knows sorrow, too. He also knows anger; the Bible is clear on that. But God is not fundamentally angry! The sorrow of God, the anger of God, these are only temporary responses to situations in a fallen world; I'm convinced He expresses sorrow and anger toward sin primarily because of the misery it brings to us, His beloved! His ways are good and they lead to joy. And the causes for His sorrow and anger will one day be banished forever through His redemptive activity. C. S. Lewis again, "*Joy is the serious business of heaven!*" And God wants us to share in that joy, and has gone to extraordinary lengths, even to the cross, to secure joy for us.

In the (*very*) little time remaining, I want to touch briefly on our Old Testament passage this morning. We just read what God said to Moses in Exodus 33:20 -- "*You cannot see My face, for no one may see Me and live.*" Why does God remain out of view to His faithful servant Moses? Why does God remain out of our view in this lifetime? Why does He say, "*No one may see Me and live.*"? Well, one way to look at this is to understand this *could* be translated from the Hebrew as, "*No one may see me and go on living.*" I think that translation hints why God wouldn't let Moses see Him, and why He won't let us see Him. I'm convinced God won't let Moses see Him because Moses just wouldn't be able to stand it ... the experience would be too intensely *wonderful* for Moses, too indescribably sweet and joyful! To behold God in all His beautiful, joyous, eternally young glory, to be in the presence of the forever young God he loved and served with all his heart ... well, Moses just wouldn't want to leave! He wouldn't want to go back down the mountain to lead that large mob of cranky people to the Promised Land; he just wouldn't want to "go on living."

Imagine, too, if he were to also catch a glimpse of the company of the redeemed there in heaven with God. All those dearly departed people who now dwell there in Heaven, forever young, for eternity! I always so much enjoy seeing the photo collages often displayed at funeral services. When I look at these frozen-in-time images I instinctively learn so much more about the deceased ... especially if I didn't know them in their younger years ... seeing them pictured in their youth, full of life and energy and strength and vigor and promise. Well, magnify that (*as Buzz Lightyear might put it*) to infinity and beyond ... imagine how you would feel to see all your dearly departed loved ones in that glorious company of the redeemed, all healthy and whole and joyful and energetic and full of life and eternally young ... would YOU want to leave? Would you want to leave their company and "*go back down the mountain*" to this imperfect world? How could anything else in this life compare to the wondrous beauty, delight, glory and joy of being a part of all that? How could Moses want to do anything else, go anywhere else, once he's seen the unveiled, joyful, eternally young presence of God? But, Moses has a life full of purpose yet to live. He has a God-given calling to fulfill. He has many lives to touch, many people to lead, many things to do, many wonderful adventures in store. But here he is graciously given enough, just enough, of a divine glimpse to keep him going.

In a nutshell, that is what we strive to do here in the ministry of this church, and especially in the ministry of our Sunday School. We try to get just enough of a glimpse of God and His good ways to keep us going, to keep us living as He would have us live, until that day we see our forever young God face to face. So, until that day --

*May God bless you and keep you always; May your wishes all come true; May you always do for others, and let others do for you. May you build a ladder to the stars, and climb on every rung. May you grow up to be righteous; may you grow up to be true. May you always know the truth and see the lights surrounding you. May you always be courageous, stand upright and be strong. May your hands always be busy; may your feet always be swift. May you have a strong foundation when the winds of changes shift. May your heart always be joyful; may your song always be sung ...*

*And may you stay forever young.*

---

<sup>2</sup> For the full quote in its context, see <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/19966-because-children-have-abounding-vitality-because-they-are-in-spirit>