

To all the Saints at Manatee Life and beyond,

**SCRIPTURE:**

Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV) – Larger reading: Jeremiah 29:10-19

*“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”*

**STORY:**

An anxious parent was speaking with a friend about his unappreciative children.

“Maybe,” the friend suggested, “you have tried to give them too much to live with and not enough to live for.”

**OBSERVATION:**

Two characters are talking in the “Candorville” comic strip of September 28, 2010 by Darrin Bell. It is the first character’s comment and questions that caught my attention. He says, “Do you want your impact on this world to outlast you? In the end, we either turn into a long-remembered story, or we fade away. If you could have people say just one thing about you at your funeral ... what would it be?” That is a sobering question.

It is this kind of question that also has me contemplating what can and should be shared at a funeral. Trying to place the life and impact of an individual into perspective is always a challenge. Though there are others who will share their remembrances it falls to the pastor to share the person’s story within the context of the Gospel. Putting a person’s journey here on earth within the context of the promises of God’s grace and mercy through Jesus Christ is truly a sacred responsibility and one I never take lightly.

I remember the very first funeral I was privileged to hold while serving the small membership Methodist church in Temple, Georgia when I was in seminary. With no training, guidance or direction, nothing in seminary prepares you for the pastor’s responsibility in these cases, I was simply thrust into the fray of assisting a family through the difficult times of an illness, death, funeral preparation and trying to help them pick-up the pieces of their shattered lives after the funeral. D. F. and Mrs. Staples spent their entire lives together – childhood, schooling, and teaching careers – their entire lives, except for 6 months, when D.F. was promoted to become a principal at another school ... he had to wait until he had an opening for a English teacher at his new location, as he shared one Sunday evening, “It was the longest 6 months of my life” ... naturally he hired his wife. It was in Junior High School that they started the practice of praying the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm as they walked together to school, later to be prayed in the car as he drove them to work. Mr. D. F. Staples will stay with me for as long as I live.

To this day I remember sitting in their living room with all the family gathered around and asking the simple question, “Tell me about his life.” More than an hour later they were still sharing his life’s journey and impact on them, the community and all the students and faculty that he was associated with. As I drove home that evening I could

feel a tear running down my cheek as I prayed, “May that be said of me when my journey on earth has reached its end.”

“If you could have people say just one thing about you at your funeral ... what would it be?” is a good question ... one that most of us do not dwell on very often nor give it much thought ... but a good question nevertheless. Who was it that said, “You only pass through this life one time so make sure it was worth the trip?” What difference have we made in people’s lives? Was our impact positive or negative ... did we add to life or take away from life? Oh, most of us would have made a few different choices along the journey, if we could do it again while retaining our present knowledge, but even in considering that issue ... how have we effected the lives of others along the journey?

The words usually come together before the funeral/memorial service, they always do, and I will stand before those gathered at the service to share them. The emotions will be mixed – grief will be deep and mixed with a little hurt or anger ... all influenced by the life lived and the memories shared. My prayer is that God will speak through my meager words to bring healing, understanding and peace. The Sun will rise again in the morning and come Monday morning we will pick-up the daily routine of our lives. Occasionally, we will think again about the departed, but eventually even those memories will fade especially as the trials of our own existence makes demands on our energy and mental resources. And again I will think of D.F. Staples and the impact he made on my life – even if I knew him better as a memory shared than a life lived.

**QUOTE:**

*“Death is not extinguishing the light from the Christian; it is putting out the lamp because the dawn has come.” - Source unknown*

**PRAYER:**

Eternal Lord, our days come and go... we barely notice there passing. We fill those hours with all kinds of stuff that adds little to the life of those around us. We are just marking time, collecting dust, trying to live the life that we are given, but ignoring the needs of others. Help us discover the real joy of loving others unselfishly and in so doing, discover the joy of life. Amen

And the faith journey continues, Pastor Jim  
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***We sing about the walls of Jericho coming down, but what about the walls that hedge us in?***