A Sermon Suggestion for Legacy Sunday

Acts 9:36-40

Luke 12:13-21

The 1978 film “House Calls” stars Walter Matthau in a story about a hospital ineptly run by Dr Amos Willoughby and in which Matthau’s character Dr Charley Nichols tries to save it from Willoughby’s disastrous attempts to practise medicine.

At one point, Dr Willoughby, who has managed to see off one of his patients, a famous and wealthy baseball team owner, is giving a eulogy at the funeral. He says of his former patient, “It has often been said that great men aren't appreciated until they die. Well, you're dead and we appreciate it.”

That might not be the way we would want to be remembered!

Then there is the story of Alfred Nobel. He had established companies across Europe and America dealing in explosives – particularly military explosives. When his older brother, Ludwig, died in 1888, newspapers mistakenly reported Alfred’s obituary. One French newspaper, under the headline “The Merchant of Death is Dead” said that he had become rich by finding ways to kill more people faster than ever before.

Nobel was horrified at the thought that this would be how he would be remembered and in an effort to rehabilitate what the world thought of him, he immediately altered his will to set up a fund which, after his death, would pay out prizes for eminence in physical science, chemistry, medical science, literature, and the establishment of peace.

Did he succeed? Well, when I mentioned the name Alfred Nobel a moment ago, what did you think? Merchant of Death or Nobel Prizes?

One person who did not need to rehabilitate her image was a disciple in Joppa named Tabitha, otherwise known as Dorcas. St. Luke described her as a disciple and tells us that she was always doing good and helping the poor. That’s not a bad reputation in its own right, but after she died, her friends, hearing that Peter was in Lydda, not far away, sent for him. When he arrived, he went to the upstairs room where they had laid out her body, all the widows who had known her wept and showed to Peter the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made. Dorcas had lived, and would live again, to clothe the poor in Christian service to her community.

What a way to be remembered.

Jesus, in contrast, tells the parable of a rich man who became even richer because his crop yield was exceptionally good. Instead of sharing his good fortune, especially with those that could have really done with it, he planned instead to store it up for his future selfish enjoyment. That very night his life was going to end. He wouldn’t get to enjoy *any* of it!

Not that I wish to sound morbid, but it makes me wonder what memories will I leave behind when my time is gone, particularly this morning, of what my church will remember about me. What about you?

Some of you will be remembered for your ready smile, some for your dedicated service preparing tea and coffee. Some for your wisdom, some for your love and care. Some come faithfully each week and though they might sit quietly and leave soon after the service, they have given the gift of being part of the body of Christ that others can join. Some of you make us laugh. Some of you make us think. Some of you drive us nuts, but we love you any way.

However great or small you think your part is in the life of this church, the reality is that you have an impact on it just by being here. You are part of the worship that goes on here. You are part of the praying community. You are part of the community that holds together this building. To many who live and work around here, you are Christ’s hands, you are his feet, and you are his voice. You tell his story, and you proclaim his love for everyone. You point to God the Father. You give yourselves to the work of the Holy Spirit.

This is all part of the legacy which one day we will leave to the church. This is how people will remember us. But, of course, this presupposes that there will still be a church to remember us and maybe that is where another part of our legacy can help. You are already supporting the life of this church with the generous donation of your time and resources. Perhaps you already give generously of your money too. In striving to leave the same sort of impression as Dorcas, though, and in light of the parable of Jesus, I wonder if perhaps we could give more thought after making provision for our loved ones, to leaving one last gift to the church to help to continue funding its mission and ministry after we are gone. The continued witness and care of this church long into the future could well be part of your legacy.