

PRAYER: Let the words of my mouth and the mediations of all our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, oh Lord you are our rock and our redeemer.

‘COME GROW OLD WITH ME’

Robert Browning often explored the concepts of old age and dying in his poems, and surprisingly enough, some of these most striking poems use Hebraic sources as intertexts. On this Sunday, Grandparent’s Day and the celebration of Bro. Martin’s 6th decade of life, we will explore Robert Browning’s idea of old age as it is conveyed in “Rabbi Ben Ezra.

“Grow old along with me! The best is yet to be, the last of life, for which the first was made. Our times are in his hand who saith, 'A whole I planned, youth shows but half; Trust God: See all, nor be afraid!’”

The truth is that this sermon is not just for one segment of the congregation; it’s for all of us. We’re all growing old. And as someone has said, “growing old is not so bad when you consider the alternative.” A 90-year-old was asked what he felt like when he woke up in the morning. He responded, “Surprised.”

One of the most disturbing aspects of aging is the growing inability to recall important information like phone numbers and where I left my glasses. This becomes particularly pronounced when you go upstairs to get something. Halfway up you realize that you have no inkling of what it is you’re going upstairs to get, so, should you go back downstairs and try to remember what it is you needed, or should you continue up and look around for something that needs bringing down? Unable to decide, you may resort to sitting on the landing, only to discover that after three minutes, you’ve completely forgotten whether you were originally upstairs going down or downstairs going up!

Well, I’m not sure that’s the way I would want to define growing old, but it does suggest that older people who enjoy a sense of humor get along far better than those who don’t. Growing old is inevitable. It’s an unavoidable process that begins at birth. The question is how do we deal with it, how do we cope, how do we grow old gracefully? Aging in Christianity is a blessing because it is the older Christians in our congregation and our world that provide us with strength, stability and wisdom. Older believers are essential for the future of the church and nation - they are going to make the church and nation better and more prosperous. Our elders are an addition to the maturity of godliness and a benediction to the body of Christ and the world just as Job said, “Wisdom is with the aged...with long life is understanding” (Job 12:12).

Our elders are a testimony to the fact that old age is still viewed as the most respected stage of life. However, there is something which everybody wants and yet almost everyone fears: growing old. Who can you think of that is a model of old age which everybody wants to emulate? **COME GROW OLD WITH ME** is about renewing and not aging of body and spirit; having feelings of usefulness and not uselessness; more friends and beneficiaries; about companionship and not loneliness; God fearing.

Psalm 71, is of an older person, sharing the many trials, success, and problems. The person is a kingdom treasurer, who is obviously a joyful person who is able to put their focus on the Lord in the midst their trials and successes. Just like the Psalmist, our elders show us that, God’s way to grow old is to develop a walk with Him now in our younger years. They have trusted God from their youth (71:5, 17); now they are older with gray head as a crown of glory found in the way of righteousness (71:9, 18). They remind of walking a long time in path of righteousness as a treasure, ‘a treasure of wisdom and a treasure of experience and a treasure of understanding, a triumphant Christian who has fought the battle over and over and over and been victorious; who has experienced everything that the young are waiting to experience, become a great treasure to the church and nation.

Birthdays are among the most visible and joyous reminders we can have of our common humanity, and our common call to journey through time with each other. For the Christian each day, each month, each year, is a gift of grace. We have birthdays every year, but ending in zero always seem bigger, especially at 70 which has the extra power of biblical authority. “The days of our life are seventy years, or perhaps eighty, if we are strong; even then their span is

only toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away” (Psalms 90:10). Being 70 reminds us of the Christian practice of a good spiritual discipline. The things we give up at 70 are often forever.

Today, I humbly give praise to God for the 60 years of my best friend, an awesome Dad and a soon to be Papa for all the mighty blessings thus far and for the rest of his years that God will bring. What God calls for in our reading today is a New Testament prophetic theme to celebrate Bro. Martin...’but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on towards the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:13-14). At 60, the word of God to you Bro. Martin (Honey) is, press forward in good health in Jesus name. To all our elders, God want you to encounter promises that are designed to cause you to jump for joy. Your years are full of God’s faithfulness and challenges like the Israelites, but a witness to God of all He has pulled you through.

Remember, God provided bread from the sky (life divine sustenance for each day) and water from the rock (of ages – stable source – Jesus the rock) to get you through the desert of life – martially, medically, professionally and spiritually. God made a way where there was no way. God who walked you through those hard places and situations is about to do a new thing in your present and a wonderful plan for the future.

COME GROW OLD WITH ME, as we continue to seek God’s wisdom, continue to keep God’s commandment, and as you hope for Jesus’s Second Coming. The character of our God has not changed. God’s grace and power have sustained each of us in the past, will see you through the present and guide us into the future. **COME GROW OLD WITH ME** is about serving God who continually does new things in our lives when we are willing to let go of the past and lay hold upon the future with faith in God who continues to do all things well. To live in the past is disabling. It means you can never be satisfied with today. It stops you seeing what God is doing or hearing what he is saying right now. Trust in God brings the past alive, gives the present meaning, and the future hope.

COME GROW OLD WITH ME summons us to develop true knowledge of God like the psalmist. We are summoned to develop the godly habits of trust, praise, and hope. The habits we develop in our younger years tend to take us further in that direction as we grow older (Ps 71:3-14). Habit of trust in God. Habit of hope in God. Trust in God’s promises. Invitation to develop a lifestyle based on the ministry for God. You are called to be involved in some kind of Christian service. **COME GROW OLD WITH ME** calls for a change of habits and attitudes from “What can I get out of the church to “How can I serve the Lord through His church?” See the stories of our elders as they exclaim, “God is to be trusted.” Observe the counter-cultural to the tragedies of old age – unloving, bitter, and selfish to transformational unconditional love, service and stewardship.

Hear our elder’s life stories - delivering and proclaiming God power and prosperity to their generation and generations to come, God is calling us to surrender to God’s way now in order to grow old in God’s way. Our elders remind us that a longer life is an opportunity for extended ministry to God and service to humanity. They provide the qualities, being temperate, dignified and sensible, in order to change the qualities of today’s youth, especially in their ‘recklessness, impulsiveness, thoughtlessness, and instability.’

Bro. Martin and each of us face the prospects of growing old, we need to ask ourselves, “What should I be doing now, however old I am, to prepare for old age?” **COME GROW OLD WITH ME** is what you prepared for many years ago. What you will be at older age is what you are becoming now. If you’re not becoming a more faithful and committed person now, you will not be a more faithful and committed person of faith tomorrow. If you are a negative, grumpy person now, you will not be a positive, cheerful person tomorrow. If you aren’t developing a walk with God now, you won’t have one later. Like the psalmist, the secret behind our elders’ testimonies and legacies are developed walks and talks with God in the years leading up to this time. They have a proven resource in the Lord which enabled them to be strong inside and outside in hope and anticipation of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

John Wesley travelled 250,000 miles by horseback to preach over 40,000 sermons, produced 400 books, and knew 10 languages. At eighty-three he was annoyed that he couldn’t write for more than fifteen hours a day without hurting his eyes. At eighty-six he was ashamed that he couldn’t preach more than twice a day. And he said, since his eighty-sixth birthday, he had to admit there was an increasing tendency to lie in bed until 5:30 a.m. What a terrible decline in

character that is. **CONTINUE TO GROW OLD WITH US** 5th Avenue Elders! Precious gift, you still have so much to offer – godly older generation; each of you are crucial, necessary, indispensable to the life of your family, church, community, and world. I pray the rest of your years shall be the best - in loving name of Jesus. Amen.