

1 Chronicles 4:4-12

These were the sons of Hur, the firstborn of Ephrathah, the father of Bethlehem. ⁵Ashhur father of Tekoa had two wives, Helah and Naarah; ⁶Naarah bore him Ahuzzam, Hephher, Temeni, and Haahashtari. These were the sons of Naarah. ⁷The sons of Helah: Zereth, Izhar, and Ethnan. ⁸Koz became the father of Anub, Zobebah, and the families of Aharhel son of Harum. ⁹Jabez was honoured more than his brothers; and his mother named him Jabez, saying, 'Because I bore him in pain.' ¹⁰Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, 'Oh that you would bless me and enlarge my border, and that your hand might be with me, and that you would keep me from hurt and harm!' And God granted what he asked. ¹¹Chelub the brother of Shuhah became the father of Mehir, who was the father of Eshton. ¹²Eshton became the father of Beth-rapha, Paseah, and Tehinnah the father of Ir-nahash.

2 Timothy 1:1-10

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, for the sake of the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus,

2 To Timothy, my beloved child:

Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

3 I am grateful to God—whom I worship with a clear conscience, as my ancestors did—when I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. ⁴Recalling your tears, I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy. ⁵I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you. ⁶For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; ⁷for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.

8 Do not be ashamed, then, of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God, ⁹who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace. This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, ¹⁰but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Saviour Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

Mark 3:31-34

31 Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him.

³²A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, 'Your mother and your brothers and sisters* are outside, asking for you.'

³³And he replied, 'Who are my mother and my brothers?'

³⁴And looking at those who sat around him, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers!'

³⁵Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.'

Who Do We Honor?

It is most appropriate that we celebrate Heritage Sunday in a church that lies smack dab in the middle of a graveyard. To my left and at ground level lie John Totten, one of the founding fathers of Tottenville, and a bunch of his relatives. To the right rests Joseph Palmer, a veteran of the Revolutionary War, and in the front of the church is the monument honoring those who served in the Grand Army of the Republic. Take a short walk through the cemetery (and I hope that you do) and you'll find the name of just about every street in Tottenville on one of the headstones or monuments. And within these walls too there are so many reminders of our heritage – you need look no further than either end of the pew you're sitting in to find the name of a member who gave money to provide the seat that you're sitting in – and it's a nice seat, too; it's been pointed out to me the curve of the wood. It required skilled craftsmen and women to build these pews. Later today we will be dedicating the windows that were placed in the two towers at the front of the building to commemorate EC Toth who many of you had the pleasure of knowing. In the back of the church there are old photos, including those of previous pastors of the church – maybe I'll be there someday. We are inescapably surrounded by heritage in this building. It seems that Bethel United Methodist Church, previously known as Bethel Methodist Episcopal Church, was planned to be church that would always remind us of our heritage.

But not everyone is remembered equally. As we were planning this service I was throwing some names around, people who had died in recent years who may at some point in time attended this church. What often happens is that family of some who were not active in church will try to figure out what church the person *was* affiliated with once upon a time, and this church is often identified as a church that many people at one time or another attended. But none of the current members remember them. But we try to do the respectful thing – if they ask me to officiate at the funeral, I do. If they ask to hold a service at the church, we say yes. Such is the way that we honor the dead. But the point is that some folks leave a legacy that endures for generations, which speaks a great deal about their character. One such person mentioned in our Old Testament lesson was a fellow named Jabez. He's not a major player in the Bible, like for example Abraham or Jacob or Moses or Jesus. But considering all the names that are mentioned in the Bible – the ones we usually skip over like those in the book of Numbers (so-and-so begat so-and-so begat so-and-so and so on), Jabez is a person who stands out. In the midst of this long list of names – those who came before him and those who came after – the Bible mentions that Jabez was honored more than his brothers. It mentions that he said a simple prayer about expanding his borders, about God's hand being with him, about God protecting him from harm. Sounds rather selfish, but it's a prayer that was answered. We have no details regarding Jabez' territorial expansion or any miraculous events that saved Jabez from danger, but he is mentioned as one who called on the Lord and who was honored by his peers, and because we're discussing this passage you can say that he's being honored even to this day. His name is not only mentioned in the Bible – his actions are noted.

I'd like us to think about that. Here we are, nearly 3000 years after Jabez, and he is honored. And we know that being honored is different from being remembered – there are quite a few generals and world conquerors who commission statues of themselves to be placed all over their empires, and they are remembered. But are they honored? We should hope that one day we will be remembered in such a way as to be honored.

The irony is that this is not something we should strive for; we should not be tooting our own horn so to speak, trying to memorialize ourselves – as I mentioned there are many characters throughout history who have tried to promote their own greatness, but our legacy really depends upon *other's* perceptions of us. The Emperor Caligula could have his own statue placed in the Temple in Jerusalem, but even that could not make others consider him a great man.

No, what makes us great are such qualities as the one Paul mentions to Timothy; FAITH. Paul drops two other names, names like Jabez, that are hardly mentioned in the Bible but names that we honor because of the impact they had on a man named Timothy. These women are named Lois and Eunice, Timothy's grandmother and mother. They must have been great women since women are not often action figures in the Bible, but these two women instill a faith in their son Timothy that has led him to follow in Paul's footsteps as a pastor and a missionary. And I have a feeling that the FAITH that Paul is referring to is more than a simple statement about what they believe and what they don't believe. It's been the tendency of too many people in the church to look upon faith as nothing more than acknowledging some facts regarding Jesus' identity and God's nature. But FAITH involves action; think of it not as FAITH IN Jesus Christ but as FAITH INTO Jesus Christ. Faith is played out in how we live our lives, obeying Christ, trusting in Christ, proclaiming Christ. These are the kinds of lives that Jesus mentions in our Gospel lesson, Jesus' true brothers and sisters, those who do the will of God. One who lives by faith is such a person. A life of faith is a life transformed so that our every thought, word, and deed is a form of worship to God. Lois and Eunice instilled such faith in Timothy to such a degree that Paul mentions them in this letter that we are still reading today. And this why they are honored even today.

So my sisters and brothers, today we appreciate people of faith, the ones who shared faith with us, and inspired us to live our lives in faith. Do not aspire to be honored by others. Rather aspire to live a life of faith in God, a life of integrity where your thoughts and words and deeds are all in sync with the will of God. May future generations remember you as one who called upon the name of the Lord, who followed the Lord.