

Inheritances & Legacies – what will we leave future generations?

(Sermon preached by Cheryl Williams at Footscray Baptist on November 2nd, 2025 – Luke 19:1-10)

My great grandparents were some of the first people to open up land in part of the Otway Ranges for dairy farming. They cleared the land so the cows could graze on green grass. They farmed there for several generations and they lived quite comfortably, which in turn meant their descendants, of which I am one, were able to live quite well. That is the legacy they left.

However, in the clearing of the land, they displaced the indigenous people of the land, they destroyed the habitat of native animals and removed all the native plants replacing them with 'English' plants.

One of my mother's cousins and I have in recent years been troubled by that legacy. As result we have both wanted to do something about that -I have chosen to leave money to an indigenous group as a way of giving back something of what my descendants took. My relative has chosen to do something different. She has bought two very large blocks of land and has started to replant them with native trees and has an overlay on them that they can never be cleared again, this is her way of giving back and of improving the environment to help arrest climate change for future generations. That is her legacy.

Yesterday was All Saints Day. You may have seen the decorations on Friday for Halloween, but the Christian tradition has always marked All Saints Day. A day when we think about and give thanks for those who have gone before us in the faith and ponder the legacy they have left for us.

Those we call saints come in all kinds of shapes and sizes. They are simply those who lived out their faith in their time. They lived the two great commandments – to love God with all you have and to love your neighbour as yourself. They lived with courage and compassion. There is St Peter, who despite his frailty and stuff ups was loved by Jesus and given the keys to the kingdom, or St. Paul who after a dramatic conversion set up churches all over Asia and visited and encouraged them in their faith, leaving us with many writings to help us in our struggles.

In the early church we have people like St. Francis and St. Clare who gave up their personal wealth to care for the creation and the poor. Or Joan of Arc who helped lead her country to freedom and then was tried as a witch because she refused to deny she heard and responded to God's voice.

And then in modern times we can name many others who join the ranks of saints. Martin Luther King Jr who fought and died for equality for all, Mandela and Tutu who worked to dismantle apartheid in their country. Oscar Romero who stood up for his community and was assassinated as he celebrated communion for that. Mother Teresa who nursed the poor in her adopted country of India or Father Damian who lived with and loved lepers (just as Jesus did) as he bandaged their wounds, cared for them as they died and who in turn caught leprosy and died from it, all as he stood up against the Catholic church. I am sure you can think of many other examples.

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In this church community we have had some saints as well. Rev Goble who was known as the Good Samaritan of Footscray for the way he cared for the poor in this community – giving away clothes, paying for wedding receptions, standing with the workers. Bruna and her extraordinary hospitality extended to all. Ros – who kept us on track as Secretary, led us in reflecting on our faith, on living and dying and did all she could to ensure the survival of this little community of faith. You will all know many others from this place.

Our reading today tells of another one who joined the ranks of the saints, a man of short stature called Zaccheus. A man with a lousy reputation as he collected taxes for the occupying Roman forces and then took a bit more to keep him in the style to which he was accustomed. Perched in the fork of the tree, he wants to see Jesus. See him he does, Jesus does not walk past, rather he stops and looks him in the eye, tells him to get down and then promptly invites himself to his place for a meal. This encounter turns Zaccheus' world upside down. He, for whatever reason sees the errors of his ways and repents (turns around) and gives back – he sells his possessions (which were probably many) and gives them to the poor and then to make it right with those he has defrauded, he doesn't just give them back what he took, he gives back four times what he took. A real turn around, a real conversion. The legacy he leaves is one that shows us what genuine repentance looks like – not just saying sorry but acting on it, giving back in financial terms in his case. His active repentance and generosity place him in the ranks of saints.

Today we celebrate and thank God for the difference all of these people have made in the world, we give thanks for their courage, perseverance and love. They have all left a legacy of some kind.

What is the legacy you will leave future generations? What physical and spiritual legacy will you leave those who come after you?

This church too, has been left a legacy, and we too, have the opportunity to think about what we will leave both spiritually and physically for future generations whoever they may be.

We have a choice, do we want the legacy we leave the next generations to be little money and buildings in disrepair? Or do we want to leave future generations with a new opportunity to minister amongst the most marginal people in our community, some new updated buildings and a guaranteed income stream to enable them to continue to creatively minister to this community for the next 140 years? The choice is ours. Stewardship suggests we should do the latter. The example of Zaccheus suggests to me we should do the latter.

Go out into this week inspired by the saints who you have loved and known, people who are just like us – mortal, flawed, doing their best to live out their faith, doing their best to follow Jesus, doing their best to love their neighbour.