



# *Lakeside Sermons*

Lakeside Baptist Church • Rocky Mount, North Carolina  
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Remembering and Reforming  
Philippians 1:3-10; Deuteronomy 6:1, 4-9

During my elementary school days, I had a friend whose house I loved to visit. Janet and I, along with our friend Marion, spent countless hours playing in the large wooded backyard, watching movies in the basement, and stifling our giggles inside our sleeping bags during sleepovers. Looking back, I think we liked hanging out at Janet's house because her parents were laid back and permissive, perhaps because they were quite a bit older than everyone else's parents and Janet's older siblings had worn them out! Whatever the reason, we knew that at the Cole home, we pretty much had the run of the house and yard, except in the living room.

The Coles had traveled quite a bit, and they had filled the large, formal space with exquisite pieces from nearly every corner of the globe. Delicate crystal, pottery, and porcelain adorned bookcase shelves, and particularly special treasures were placed on the glass coffee table so that they would be front and center when guests would drop by. As hospitable as the Coles were, the half-joking threats of spankings if anything in that room got broken, convinced us that the living room was off limits and that our games of tag or hide-and-seek were not to cross that threshold.

Years later, when I graduated from seminary, I returned to Roanoke Rapids to serve in my first ministry position at Rosemary Baptist Church where the Coles were members. Mrs. Cole was already in declining health by then, and after one of her many surgeries, the senior minister, Tom Bodkin, went by to check on her. He tells the story that she welcomed him graciously into the living room where they sat on either side of the coffee table to chat. Within a few minutes, the Cole's young granddaughter Lynlee came bounding into the room. Even as a preschooler, Lynlee knew she had to be careful around the fragile items in that room, so she came right up to the pastor, shook her finger in the direction of the coffee table, and said, "Pastor Tom, you see that table right there? If you touch that table, my grandma will pop your fat hand!"

From the time we are very young, most of us learn that there are some places we can run around and have fun and others where we are required to

be calm and careful. There are some things that we can touch and use and enjoy and others that are to be handled with care or are off limits altogether.

All of us have things we treasure because they are expensive or rare or hold some sentimental value, the things we store in protective cases and take out only on special occasions. And then we have those items we use every day, those things we love because they are broken in and comfortable, they fit just right, or because they are just . . . us.

And we all know that we treat those two categories of things differently, don't we? I have a hundred-year-old quilt my great-grandmother made tucked carefully away in a cedar chest, but the favorite throw which keeps me warm while I'm watching tv may get dropped on the floor, dragged around by the kids, or claimed temporarily by the dog. The tuxedo or cocktail dress may be hung carefully in a garment bag while a favorite sweatshirt is washed and worn until it is threadbare. The family heirloom china is stored away carefully and pulled out only when company comes, but the coffee mug that fits just perfectly in your hand is washed every day so that it can accompany you wherever you go.

The first group is made up of things that we think of as valuable, things we revere and maybe even cherish, but because they are fragile, like museum artifacts, we admire them from a distance, but we don't truly know and love them. And then there are those things we really love, the ones that are reliable and familiar, that we know inside and out and value them because they become a part of our everyday routine and are comfortable to us.

When Spencer and I were in New York a few weeks ago, we visited the Immigration Museum on Ellis Island. One of my favorite exhibits there is called "Treasures from Home," a room filled with items that families brought with them when they left their homelands to sail toward freedom and opportunity in America. Often a combination of treasured family heirlooms and necessary, practical items, these displays are representations of what an entire family might have crammed into a single steamer trunk to start a new life in a new land: A handmade-lace christening gown packed with forks and spoons; a ceremonial headpiece or scarf accompanied by a woodworking tool; a traditional musical instrument alongside a sewing machine. Every time I see this display, it makes me wonder what I would choose if I had to pack up my belongings hurriedly and leave home for good. What would I want to preserve of my heritage, and what would be most useful for the future?

When the Israelites departed Egypt to sojourn through the wilderness, they didn't have time to pack anything at all. Since they had been slaves, it's

not likely that they owned much of great monetary value, but the family keepsakes, the tools they relied on for work and daily life—all but the walking sticks in their hands, the sandals on their feet, and the clothes on their backs—they had to leave behind as they shared a last hurried meal and sneaked away from Pharaoh under the cover of darkness. God asked for their utter loyalty, but as he led them out across the desert for a generation-long journey toward the Promised Land, he also asked for their complete trust that he would provide for their every need. God didn't ask them to take only their most valuable possessions. He asked them to take nothing save their faith that his provision would be enough.

In Deuteronomy, after leading them through the wilderness for forty years, God pauses with the Israelites so that Moses can give few final reminders. As they stand on the threshold of realizing the dream of the Promised Land, God gives them the greatest of his commandments, the centerpiece of their life of faith: (Read Deuteronomy 6:1, 4-9).

Known as the Shema, this declaration made over 3,500 years ago remains vital to Jewish thought and worship. These words continue to call Jews to prayer each day, to represent the central doctrine of their faith, and to serve as a reminder of their identity. "Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might." (Deut. 6:4-5).

But God's commandment doesn't end there. He says to his people that these words which define their faith and identity are not to be tucked away in an ancient book only to be brought out on holy days. They are not to be reserved for the Temple or remembered only as a part of their heritage. No, God's commandment to keep him at the center of their lives and to love him above all else is to be lived and repeated, taught to their children, and posted on their doors as a constant reminder to them and a sign to everyone else to whom they belong. They are to live and breathe these words every day so that they shape who they are as individuals and guide them in their communal living. They are to make sure these words never become a religious relic or an historical footnote. Instead, these words are to be their constant companions, the tool they rely on every day, and a reminder that God is not just a hero who rescued them in the past but the Creator and Redeemer who is still among them guiding and shaping who they will become.

We hear echoes of this reminder in Paul's letter, written to his beloved Philippian congregation while he was under house arrest in Rome, as he expresses thanks not only for what God has accomplished among them in the past, but also for the evidence he sees that God is still working among them,

that their faith remains vibrant, and that they are continuing to teach and live the love of Christ which has been shared with them. Paul's words are a call to remember as well as a challenge to continue to be shaped and formed by the work of God within and among us.

Occasions such as today are a good opportunity for us to respond to the call to remember and to be reformed. Just as visiting the "Treasures from Home" exhibit helped me to appreciate what those from the past sacrificed to make a new life in this country, it also caused me to consider the things I treasure from my past and the ones that are most valuable to me now. When we reach a milestone like a graduation, we can't help but look back at all that has been accomplished, all the memories that are precious to us, and all that has been. And as we celebrate and recognize our graduates, anticipating all that they will become as God continues to work in their lives, it is for all of us an opportunity to consider how God might be working to reform us as individuals and as a community. We remember and are thankful for what has been. We are excited about the possibilities that lie ahead, both for our graduates and for this part of Christ's body called Lakeside Baptist Church.

For our young people who are about to step out into the promise and possibility of the future, there will be many demands to achieve and perform, pressures to fit in, and temptations to abandon much of what has influenced them to this point. We all feel those pressures, I suppose, as we work and accomplish and change through each stage of life. But for high school graduates who are ready to leave what is safe and familiar for the excitement and challenge of college life, or for college graduates who stand ready to take on adult responsibilities of career and home, these changes will come fast and furious. It is an exciting time, but also a daunting one, in your life and in the lives of your families, your circle of friends, and yes, even your church.

We want the best for you, we pray for your well being and your safety, and we anticipate the ways you will grow and flourish and make your own mark on the world. So my call to you today is the same call God gave the Israelites and the same one Paul offered to the Philippians: As you enter this unknown territory and embrace the possibility of all that lies ahead of you, remember and reform.

Remember who you are and whose you are. Remember the people who have loved you, nurtured you, and taught you. Remember the lessons you have learned and the values imparted. Remember the faith that has been planted within you as the foundation for the decisions you will make and the persons you will become. Remember the gifts that God has placed within you and the opportunities you have had to develop and use them. Remembering

is important because it will show you where you have been, remind you of your heritage, guide you when the path ahead is unclear, and sustain you when energy and inspiration are depleted.

But also remember that remembering is not our only call. The lessons you've learned, the faith in which you have been nurtured, and especially the work of God within you is not just an artifact to be admired, an heirloom to be protected and only brought out for special occasions, or a page in your life's history. These gifts of faith are meant to be carried with you on your journey as tools you will use to shape your life and nourishment to rely on as you grow. Too often in our well-intentioned effort to approach faith with reverence and awe, we end up locking it away in a secure place and keeping it at a safe distance from the challenges and struggles of our daily lives. Perhaps we are afraid for our faith to be stretched, afraid that it might change too much from the comfortable and familiar place in which we have sought refuge, afraid that it may even break under the weight of our doubts and failures.

But God's greatest commandment to his people is a call to remember what God has done while continuing to rely on God's provision for the future. It is a call not to treat our faith as a fragile heirloom relegated to fond remembrance and admired on special occasions but to recognize that it is sturdy enough to be handled and turned over in our hearts and minds until we know it inside and out. It is reliable enough for us to carry it with us every day to guide us, challenge us, and comfort us. It is important enough for us to bind it to our hearts and minds and hands so that it will become the source and vision for whatever work we do in this world. And it is powerful enough to mold and shape us into the image of Christ if we will remain open to being reformed by it.

Graduates, as you prepare in the coming weeks to venture into your own land of promise and possibility, my prayer for you is that you will remember the faith that has been shared with you in this place, not simply as a part of your heritage, but even more as a growing, vibrant, transformative force that will guide and reform you throughout all of life. So go with the assurance that you are surrounded by the prayers of these people and empowered by the God who has created you lovingly in his image. Go in the hope that wherever the journey of life takes you and whatever you do with the days you are given, you are nurtured by God's love and sustained by God's grace. Go with the blessings of this family of faith to claim your place among the people of God, even as God continues the work which he has begun in you. Go with our prayers and our blessings, not only to treasure your faith begun here, but also stretching and nurturing and growing your faith throughout all of life, and trusting God's promise to provide all that you need for the journey. Amen.

**May 21, 2017**

**Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession**

We are grateful, O God, that we are not on this journey of life and faith alone, but that we choose our pathways, overcome our challenges, and rejoice in our blessings together. How good and right it was to have placed us in community, as a family, with you as our divine parent. Thank you, Lord, for teaching us to rely upon one another in all things.

Thank you for the guidance and grace you offer to us day by day. When we seek your guidance, our choices are better made, and when we choose poorly, your mercy enables us to find our way back to the better path. Continue to lead us, O God, and grant us the courage and energy to choose wisely.

You have blessed our young people in immeasurable ways and endowed them with gifts which will serve them well in the years to come. Help them always to recognize that every good gift comes from you. Remind them constantly that you call us all to a life of service. And fill them every day with a desire for justice and tendency toward compassion.

We pray for the families who begin the mixed blessing of sending their children out into the world. Grant them the courage needed to begin letting go of the emerging adults they have nurtured throughout life. Provide them with the wisdom necessary to know when to continue being parents to young people who are not yet fully grown. Above all, wrap them in your grace, we pray, and bless these years of growth and change.

We ask your blessing for us all, O God. We have needs of body, mind, and spirit that we cannot meet alone. Provide us with the care we need, the support and encouragement that is essential for all of life, and the peace which comes only from you. Bless our brothers and sisters in this community with whom we share faith. Guide us all to be faithful to our calling to follow you. And remind us that every day holds the potential for new life renewed in your love. We are grateful for your love and for the vibrancy of life that is ours. In turn, we give ourselves to you and offer our loyalty and devotion, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Jody C. Wright  
Senior Minister

Good Morning everyone. Wow... it's crazy this day has finally come. I still haven't grasped the fact that I will be graduating from Rocky Mount High School in 3 weeks. I also haven't grasped the fact that I will be attending the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in August for four years. I could not have reached these steps in my life without my family, friends, faith, and this church.

I am sure you're wondering what you did to influence my future. It is pretty simple. Each and every one of you has found a way to put a smile on my face and make me feel special, even from a family of 5 children. Whether receiving a newspaper clipping including a horrifying action photo of me with a special note attached, or simply smiling and speaking to me, I feel connected to all of you. My family and I are constantly busy with anything and everything, but every time I attend church and church activities, I feel welcome. I want to thank you all for your pure support, happiness, and faith.

Throughout the 18 years of my life, my faith has grown, and I cannot wait to see how much more it can grow over these next four years and on. It all began the day Dr. Wright walked me down the aisle as a baby, speaking words of grace. At that moment I was a child of God, and I wouldn't want anyone else to initiate my faith. Thank you, Dr. Wright. I also want to thank Miss Amy. Unlike Carson and Bo, I do not have an angelic voice... at all. So, you're probably wondering why I am thanking you. Every time I attend church, I am blessed with the choir and their beautiful voices. I also become incredibly excited when listening to the children's choir, and even more excited when Bo or Carson has a solo. Without you, the church and I would not be able to hear such beautiful hymns with such beautiful music. Thank you, Miss Amy. The music you put together makes my faith even stronger.

Also, thank you Mrs. Elizabeth. Other than my parents and grandma, you have successfully been able to look after and take care of the Browder 5. You are so caring in many ways. You care for me at a personal level, and also care for me as a Child of God. The amount of effort you put into the youth group and church is incredible, and is never overlooked. Thank you for letting the youth group take that extra and a bit difficult hike to see and touch the glacier in Alaska. Thank you for taking us to New York City, even with the stress of travel. Thank you for doing everything possible to help raise money for our youth group to go out and experience life together. Thank you for everything.

Last but not least, I want to give a shout out to my grandma Jean. You have constantly showered me with Bible verses and stories about God and faith as a whole. Your pure heart has affected me more than you will ever know. I will never forget the day I found a way to let Jesus into my heart, and you being the first one I told. Thank you for sharing your faith and love.

As you all can see, I am incredibly thankful for every little thing that occurs at this church. Lakeside allows me to see how good people are in this world, all tied together by faith. I have learned many things, and have become a much better person because of all of you here. I cannot wait to go to UNC and experience a new step in my life, but I truly do not want to let go of the life I have here at Lakeside. I know I can attend any church in Chapel Hill and receive the same amount of faith to continue to grow, but nothing can replace Lakeside Baptist Church. No worries, I will come back and visit, but I will truly miss all of the memories. Again, thank you all for what you do for this church and each individual here; it never goes unnoticed and I appreciate it all.

Lindy Pittman, Graduate Remarks

May 21, 2017

Hi. For those of you who do not know me, my name is Lindy Pittman. I am the grandchild of Sheila and Jim Martin (or as I call them, Grandmom and Jimmarden, all one word). I've been a part of the Lakeside youth program since I was 7 years old. Ever since I was little my grandmom would bring me to youth group. To be honest, at the beginning I dreaded it a bit. I didn't want to hang out with kids I barely knew in a church I felt a stranger in. But that dread quickly and absolutely transformed into excitement and joy. I found a community here, with new friends and new opportunities to enjoy myself in and grow as a person through. I have found myself here from regular Sunday night activities to pilgrimages as I have grown older. I have been lucky enough to travel to New York, Alaska and Seattle with the Lakeside youth group. This has been made possible through the support and generosity of the Lakeside congregation sitting before me today.

I will never forget the trip to New York I went on, and our collaboration with the youth outreach program there and all the adventures we had with them. I especially remember Barkley and I participating in a Zumba class, dancing our hearts out with complete strangers in New York. I remember the giant van we rode around in in Alaska, with all of the backseats flipped down so we could lie down and play cards or monopoly in the back. I also remember the majestic beauty of Denali and seeing God's face in the untamed wilderness of Alaska.

And then this past summer in Seattle, traveling to a major metropolitan area with tons of culture, but most importantly a ton of Pokémon, sometimes to Elizabeth's dismay. No phones in places of worship though, not even in the Scientology Center. All these grand adventures aside, some of my fondest memories were right here in Rocky Mount in the youth room at Lakeside. Even though Miss Elizabeth could occasionally get somewhat frustrated with

us (ok VERY frustrated, which was almost always our fault), I knew she was forever looking out for me and the rest of the youth group. I am endlessly grateful for both her care and influence as well as the rest of the congregation's. I have forged lifelong friendships here, with the entire youth group, from those that have graduated before me all the way down to our youngest members. I have loved being a member of the Lakeside youth group for these years and I'm grateful to all of you for that opportunity.