



WESTMINSTER
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

November 22, 2015

Bless This House
Dr. Tammy Yeager

Bless This House

Dr. Tammy Yeager

© 2015 by Dr. Tammy Yeager and Westminster Presbyterian Church.

All rights reserved.

No part of this sermon may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means including information storage and retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the author.

Printed in the United States of America

First Printing: November 24, 2015

II Samuel 7:27-29

John 14:1-3

*“...with your blessing shall the house of your
servant be blessed forever.”*

(II Samuel 7:29)

In 1927, an Englishwoman, Helen Taylor, wrote the words to “Bless This House,” a song that became connected with this season of Thanksgiving. I found the lyrics on YouTube with a background of that famous painting by Norman Rockwell; the one where the family’s sitting around the Thanksgiving table eyeing up the perfectly golden-brown roasted turkey that gram and gramps are bringing to the table. “Bless this house O Lord we pray, keep it safe by night and day,” is the well-known opening line of the song. The lyrics go on to ask God’s blessing on each part of the house; the doors and windows that they might let in the light of God, and love, and joy, and peace. A blessing is asked for the inhabitants of the house as well; that they might one day live in God’s house and dwell with him forever.

As this year goes by so quickly now, bringing us closer and closer to the celebration of the birth of our Savior, it’s a time when we seem to be drawn to our homes like a magnet. Millions are traveling home this weekend to be with their family. Our houses play an important role in our celebrations and our gatherings with family and friends. It’s the perfect season to give God thanks for our blessings, and to ask God’s blessing on all that we have, especially our homes. King David offered this beautiful prayer, “For you, O Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, have made this revelation to your servant, saying, ‘I will build you a house,’ therefore your servant has found the courage to pray this prayer to you. And now, O Lord God, you are God, and your words are

true, and you have promised this good thing to your servant; now therefore may it please you to bless the house of your servant, so that it may continue forever before you; for you, O Lord God, have spoken, and with your blessing shall the house of your servant be blessed forever.”

A month or so ago, we had the memorial service here in the sanctuary for Bob Hardy, one of the brothers who founded 84 Lumber. I told his family what an awesome business I thought that was, helping people build houses, being a part of creating places that are containers of life, treasure chests of living, safe havens, shelters from so many things that could harm us. Maya Angelou said, “The ache for home lives in all of us, the safe place where we can go as we are and not be questioned.” What a blessing, what an incredible gift from God it is to have a house.

The definition of house, the very concept of what a home is varies tremendously from age to age, and one culture to the next. For us a house is a basic necessity of life. Yet, there are so many people who don't have one. The last time anybody even attempted to count the world's homeless was back in 2005 when the United Nations' Commission on Human Rights reported that over one hundred billion people in the world lacked adequate housing and over one hundred million had no home at all. Now, that number has to be much bigger with the latest figures reported by World Vision out of Syria. Twelve million Syrians have been forced from their homes, half of those are children. Many are risking their lives, and the lives of their children in search of a safe haven; in search of a place where doors and windows might once again let in joy, and love, and peace for their families.

With the world struggling to find a way to care for all those desperate people, we're asking ourselves, "Are we willing to open our homeland, would we be willing to open the doors of our own house to give a stranger shelter?" We're reminded of the passage in Matthew where Jesus is describing judgment day; separating the sheep from the goats by whether or not the hungry had been given food, the thirsty had been given something to drink, and the stranger had been welcomed in. Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for the least of these you did not do for me." Reflecting on these things reveals a lot about who we are, and how we think of God's gift of a house, and what we're supposed to do with it.

I was surprised to find that the word house appears in the Bible over eighteen hundred times; though many of those uses refer to family rather than an actual physical structure. When Joshua said "As for me and my house we will serve the Lord," he was referring to people. But, if you think about it there are many interesting stories of actual houses in the Bible that served the Lord too;

The giant floating house of Noah and his family that preserved the remnants of creation through the flood,

The house of Rahab built in to the walls of Jericho that hid the spies that Joshua sent and was protected from harm when she hung a crimson cord in her window,

The house filled to overflowing with people wanting to see Jesus where the roof was taken off so that a crippled man could be lowered in for Jesus to heal him,

The mysteriously pre-arranged house with the guest room upstairs that became the site of the last supper,

And imagine being the home owner of the house where Pentecost happened; suddenly from heaven comes a violent rush of wind, and tongues of fire whipping through your dining room, and then all of your guests start speaking in foreign languages!

We always say, “Oh, if those walls could talk the stories they’d tell!

So many memories take hold of our hearts in our houses; it makes them so hard to leave when the time comes. We develop such an emotional attachment to our homes, and their contents. A couple from one of our retirement villages told me that a few weeks ago they discovered they’d been long time neighbors of one of the other residents there. So, on one of these sunny fall days they all decided to take a drive back to the old neighborhood together. When they found their friend’s house, they parked out front for a bit and just sat with him, and listened as so many memories came flooding back to this man. Then they pulled to the side of the house and the reminiscing went on. And so, they continued on around to the back, and just let the stories flow until they had all been told.

I think most of us could do this; I know I could tell you stories about the tiny red bead that’s in the keyhole of my parent’s bedroom door, and the register I sat on to keep warm and watch TV in our living room, and the slippery wooden floor of my brothers’ bedroom that we used to scoot around on with pillows under tents we made with sheets draped between my three brothers’ beds. It’s easy to walk away from a house, but, oh so hard to leave a home. The famous American physician and poet from the early 1800’s, Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr., once said, “Where we love is home, home that our feet may leave, but not our hearts.”

Love is what turns mortar and bricks and boards in to so much more; a place where lasting relationships can grow and wonderful memories are created. But, sadly we know that not every home is blessed with love, not every house evokes pleasant memories, not every house is a home.

Winston Churchill once said, “We shape our dwellings, and afterwards our dwellings shape us.” This got me thinking, all houses are green- houses aren’t they, things grow there, and our choices matter? As Churchill said, we are shaped by what happens inside our houses, and in the ways we choose to use them. Houses are places where selfishness and greed, conflict, judgment, prejudice, cruelty, criticism, and discontent could easily grow if those seeds take root.

I’ve always loved Paul’s advice to the Philippians, and I take it to heart when it comes to the kind of environment we should cultivate in our homes. Paul said, “Finally beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.” This sounds like a house where love could grow, and spill over in to the world around it.

Jesus spoke a lot about houses. He often used them in his parables. There’s the parable of the lost sheep and the prodigal son who return home to a magnificent party in the house; and the story of the woman desperately sweeping her house in search of a missing coin. There’s the master who left his house to go on a trip, and returned to find that some of his servants had wasted the talents he had

entrusted in their care, and the parable that warns us to build our house on the rock of doing God's word, and not on the shifting sand. Each of these parables has a lesson to teach us about how we should live and what we should do with our blessings. Shortly before he died Jesus summed up all the lessons of his teachings when he said to his disciples, "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come and make our home with them."

And then, there's the well-known passage we read this morning from John, where Jesus describes heaven like a house; his Father's house with many rooms. He says that he's gone to prepare a place for us, and that one day he will come and bring us to be with him. If heaven is like a house, then it's safe to say that if we're blessed enough to have one, we have a little slice of heaven. And, so many reasons to be grateful for it, to use it for God's purposes, and to trust in God to bless, and keep it safe.

We thank you, oh God, for all of our blessings. We pray that every person will find the shelter we need on earth, and the eternal home we long for in you. Amen.



WESTMINSTER
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

2040 Washington Road
Pittsburgh, PA 15241
412-835-6630

www.westminster-church.org