

What do you think? Is it better to befriend a stranger or have common sense? What do you think? Is it better to feed the hungry or have common sense? What do you think? Is it better to risk injury in helping one who may be desperately in need or have common sense? What do you think? Is it better to live your life helping another, especially a child, or having common sense? What do you think? How are we to spend a lifetime of days granted to us? Should we focus on the needs of others or have only common sense and focus on ourselves? Is there something worthwhile in which to spend a lifetime? Bob Keeshan thought there was.

I have to tell you that when I picked up the paper yesterday morning and read the caption on the front of the Atlanta Journal Constitution, a part of me sort of died. I learned, as many of you did, that Bob Keeshan died on Friday. My generation remembers him as “Captain Kangaroo.” Remember his show? I hadn’t thought of it in years until yesterday. It aired Monday-Saturday, each morning on CBS back in the 60s. About the only time I got to watch it was on Saturdays, since it wasn’t televised until 8:00 in the central time zone where I grew up. How I loved it when I was sick and had to stay home from school. If I wasn’t too sick, I got to watch Captain Kangaroo!

All those memories came flooding back yesterday as I read about America’s grandfather and the contributions he made, along with Mr. Green Jeans, Dancing Bear, Mr. Moose, and Bunny Rabbit. His entire career was spent entertaining children and exerting pressure on the industry to remove any cartoons or shows that were too violent or had racial overtones. Someone noted that Captain Kangaroo dedicated himself to children in a noble way, which, in this day and time, is hard to do. Indeed that is a worthy way to spend a lifetime of days.

There are many people out there who need you and me, the church, to spend a lifetime of days – a lifetime of days holy to the Lord. Who are these people? They are all children. Children, like those in Captain Kangaroo’s audience, innocent as they are; children, like the teenager in this morning’s drama<sup>1</sup> named Rachel, who needed a bit of food, a few clothes, a mirror, some soap, even perfume, and, more importantly, a friend with whom she could talk; children like you and me – children in their 30s and children in their 60s and children in their 90s. We’re all children aren’t we? And people, like you and me, the church, are children of the Lord who are called to spend a lifetime of days holy to our Lord.

That seems to be what Nehemiah was saying to the Lord’s children after they had finally completed the rebuilding of the Temple after it had laid in ruins for nearly a century some 450 years before Christ was born. Now I realize the text from which I read in Nehemiah 8 says a particular day was designated as “holy.” I’m sure those dear people were just like you and me. They probably approached each day differently and led themselves to believe that there were only certain days that were holy. I wonder? Did the Governor of old wish, as I do at times, that he had emphasized, “Not only is this day holy, but every day is holy to the Lord, and you are to spend a lifetime of days holy to Him?” He probably did.

Maybe he was like I am: naïve. Maybe he thought after listening to Ezra, the man of the cloth, fulfill his priestly function of reading the scriptures from the Law of Moses, they would have understood the intention in his words, “Today is a holy day.” He said that to them twice. Even the Levites, who were helping the people understand the words Ezra read, declared, “...*this day is holy*” (v. 11b). So thrice they were told, “*This day is holy*” (vv. 9b, 10b, 11b). Sounds sort of Resurrection, doesn’t it? Three times said. Enough. Three days. Enough. Nehemiah may have reckoned in his own heart, “These children have heard these words, ‘This day is holy,’ three times. Surely they realize it’s not just this particular day, but it is every day. Enough said.” But they, like we, didn’t get it. So life would continue to bounce back and forth between holiness and not so holiness.

You would agree that we are to live a lifetime of days holy to the Lord, wouldn't you? Our living is to be different. Our living is to touch lives, just as the drama stressed. Mary Pat was touching the life of a homeless teen named Rachel just as Captain Kangaroo sought to touch the lives of countless children worldwide. Our living is to make a difference in the world. Too often, though, we live for "the moment" instead of for "the lifetime" and the failure to make a difference is evident. How so? As I see it the story of Rachel is still being told and there are fewer and fewer Captain Kangaroos out there touching the lives of those most impressionable.

You see it is easier to live in grief over our sinful nature than it is to do something about it. When Ezra read the Law to those "*men and women and all who could hear with understanding*" (vv. 2, 3) – seems to me this is, in all likelihood, a reference to children since children can hear with understanding – all they could do was weep. "We've not lived life as we should have lived it," was the thought in their minds. They were convicted by the ancient word as it was read to them, some for the first time, and the text leaves the notion that all they wanted to do was grieve over their sinfulness.

To be sure, all of us should grieve, even weep, over our sinful nature. There should be a heartfelt sorrow for our sins and our refusal to act. The holy thing to do, however, is to move beyond grief and celebrate. Yes I said celebrate. Realizing our action or inaction is incorrect and then correcting it by ministering to the Rachels of this world is a reason to celebrate.

Nehemiah, Ezra, and the Levites challenged the people to move beyond their sorrow. Sure there was genuine sorrow and there should have been. Sure there were tears of remorse and quite appropriate. But there was also a need for action. So Nehemiah said, "*Go your way, eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions of them to those for whom nothing is prepared*" (v. 10). Who were these people? The ones for whom nothing was prepared? Maybe they hadn't had the time to prepare food and wine due to sickness or death. Maybe they were the less fortunate, those who didn't have anything to prepare. Whether one or the other or a combination of both, the point Nehemiah was making is that this day, which is holy, is a day of sharing with anybody and everybody – especially the less fortunate.

To live a lifetime of days holy to the Lord invites one to a continual celebration and the sharing of blessings with those who have none. There are a lot of Rachels in the world. There are a lot of children whose lives still need to be touched by a Captain Kangaroo. There are people whose lives are held captive by hunger – hunger for physical food for the body and hunger for spiritual food for the soul. This is why we are to do more than weep.

Jesus was aware of this. Having spent forty days without physical food in the wilderness, He returned to the north in Galilee, according to the text that Patti read in Luke 4, "*filled with the power of the Spirit*" (v. 14). And what power it was! It enabled Him to announce Good News. When you think about it, He was sort of a modern day Ezra on that particular Saturday. The overseer of His hometown synagogue invited Him, in all likelihood, to read the assigned passage for synagogues everywhere that particular Sabbath Day. Isaiah 61 was the text. The reaction in Nazareth, however, was quite different from the one during Ezra's day centuries before in Jerusalem. In a few weeks, I'm going to examine the reaction of the people to Jesus' interpretation of this word recorded in Luke 4 under the theme "The Unnerving Words of Jesus." For now, notice Jesus' devotion to a lifetime of days holy to the Lord.

Whenever the Holy Spirit is upon us, we are different. Whenever the power of the Holy Spirit fills us, we are able to celebrate and share with humanity's children. All of Jesus' life was characterized by sharing – with the poor, the captives, the blind, and the oppressed. All of Jesus' life was characterized by celebration – this is the year of the Lord's favor. It was Jubilee time! It still is.

Four weeks from yesterday we'll have the opportunity to share the Lord's favor with those in need. You've heard about Compassion Day, which is Saturday, February 21. A Task Force, headed by Kathy Lott, is hard at work, to provide opportunities for every age group in Tabernacle to minister to "*those for whom nothing is prepare.*" The Pastoral Team liaison is Charles Cox. It will be a great day

of proclaiming in deed and sharing “*portions*” with those who may have nothing – Christians and non-Christians.

That day, a holy day because it is set aside for a specific and different task, will be a reminder that every day is holy and therefore everyday is a day to celebrate and share with anybody and everybody in need – you know, the Rachel types of humanity. And they are here in Carrollton, aren’t they? Our calling from Nehemiah and Jesus is to share portions of our blessings with those in need as they come to us or as we go to them. Doing that consistently is really the living of a life of holiness. And our holiness might provide a surprise for us.

Two years ago, I began a conversation with a young man who was a very intelligent student at the university who was from up north. He was in his second year at West Georgia. We would meet once a week to talk about life and the Bible. Especially in light of 9/11, he wanted to make sure he wasn’t reading things into the scriptures. It was a growing experience for both he and I. This began in January and continued through April. At our last meeting, he told me of a financial need. He was short \$220.00 for rent that month. He asked if the church could help him. He offered to sign a note, saying he would repay the money. I told him that wasn’t necessary and that he didn’t have to pay the money back. He insisted that he did. Contact was made with his landlord to verify the amount and other particulars. A check was cut and forwarded to the landlord. The young man thanked me, assuring me he would repay the money. That was the last I saw him or heard from him. But last week, I heard.

I received a call from this young man. He apologized for not being in touch with me for nearly two years. He wanted to come by the church and repay the \$220.00. He said, “I’m embarrassed that it’s taken this long.” I said, “Remember what I told you? You didn’t have to pay this back. If you wanted to that was fine. But you didn’t have to.” He said, “But I told you that I would. I’m embarrassed that it’s just now, though.” I said, “Well you never said when you would pay it back, so don’t feel too badly. You’re doing what you said you would do and this is what counts most. You are being a person of integrity.” He came by the office last Tuesday afternoon and left a check for \$220.00 with Jo. Holiness produces holiness.

So what do you think? Is it better to be a believer who seeks to live a lifetime of days holy to the Lord or a believer who lives day-by-day with only common sense? Should we focus on the needs of others or have common sense and focus only on ourselves? Is there something worthwhile in which to spend a lifetime? Captain Kangaroo thought there was and children, like Jimmy Gentry, were blessed. Mary Pat thought there was, too. Because she did, Rachel found a friend. Nehemiah and Jesus thought there was as well. Both believed in living a lifetime of days holy to the Lord. May you and I believe it too – especially in light of all the Rachels in the world. For you could very well be Rachel, couldn’t you? Maybe you are.

**Sermon by Dr. Jimmy Gentry, Pastor  
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**All scriptures, unless otherwise noted, are from the New Revised Standard Version, 1989**

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<sup>1</sup> Donna Lagerquist, “The Story of Rachel” from The Willow Creek Association, 1998.