

Epworth Chapel on the Green  
November 1, 2015  
All Saints Sunday  
The Rev. Dr. Brook Thelander

2 Chronicles 6:18-22  
Psalm 149  
Ephesians 1:15-23  
Matthew 5:1-12

His name was David Radley. He came to pastor the little church Connie and I were attending as teenagers in 1978. The church had fallen on hard times, both spiritually and financially. The building was old and in a state of disrepair. The grounds were homely and unattractive. The morale of the people in the congregation was low.

But Pastor Radley saw something in us. He saw possibilities, especially in the kids that made up our wonderful youth group. He taught us that God was interested in us, and he reminded us frequently that he prayed for us every day.

After being with us for a few months, Pastor Radley challenged the congregation to take a step of faith and to commit to a full renovation of the building and grounds. With both the bank account and the church's faith very low, we responded to his challenge. People began to pray and to give and to work. Within eighteen months or so the change was striking, both in the appearance of the facility and the spirit of the people.

This was now a church that was winsome in its appearance, the kind of place we wanted to invite people to worship with us. And we did. The spirit of fear and discouragement had given way to a spirit of faith and optimism.

Pastor Radley challenged everyone to live their faith and to be involved, but he particularly challenged all of us who were in the youth group. He constantly admonished us not to let others look down upon us because of our youth, but to set an example for the whole church in our faith and our obedience. And he never tired of reminding us that he prayed for us each and every day.

A few years later Pastor Radley fell upon hard times, both personally and spiritually. He and his wife divorced, and he left the ministry. Through the years, though, Connie and I kept in touch with him, and sometimes he with us. Many years later he reentered the ministry, and for a time he pastored a church in Colorado. My brother, Rod, was also pastoring in Colorado, not far from where Pastor Radley was living. They would often see each other at pastors' functions.

Just before we moved here to Boise to pastor at Epworth, David Radley was diagnosed with cancer. He phoned me not long before he died, and I'll always remember the wonderful conversation we had. He reminded me again how proud he was of all of the kids in our youth group, and for how their lives had turned out.

He had a good reason for joy. One of the young men in that group became an attorney, a wonderful Christian who is active in his church and in the Nebraska

state bar. Two of those teens went on to become chiropractors, active now in their churches and leaders in their communities. One now works for a legal firm in suburban Kansas City. Two went on to become pastors.

My brother Rod officiated Pastor Radley's funeral, and after the service he phoned me. He told me of an experience he had with pastor Dave just a few weeks before his death. He happened to be in pastor Dave's study one morning to take care of some pastoral business. On Dave's desk my brother noticed a 3x5 index card, worn around the edges and faded from years of time.

The card was full, but Rod could not see clearly what was written on it. So he inquired, "Dave, what's on the card?"

Pastor Dave picked it up and handed it to my brother. My brother looked down to see names, numerous names. And at the top of that card was *his* name, and mine, and Connie's, and the name of every teenager who had been part of that little church in Superior, Nebraska. And he proceeded to tell my brother that in the 22 years that had passed since he pastored that little church, he had prayed for the people on that card *every single day*.

I have never considered myself a titan of pastoral ministry. But of one thing I am certain: I would not be who I am today without the godly influence of David Radley.

And each of you today has a David Radley in your life. Perhaps not a pastor, but maybe a teacher, a grandparent, someone you worked with, or a neighbor. Someone who was an example to you, someone who showed you what was possible if you put your trust in God. Someone who challenged you to think beyond yourself and to give your life away.

And for all of those people who are known to us, there are others who have led us in the life of faith who are unknown to us. Persons like Ignatius of Loyola, St. John Chrysostom, Gregory the Great, Ambrose of Milan, St. Catherine of Siena, Sister Theresa, Phoebe Palmer, and others.

Writing to the Ephesians, Paul states that he wants the believers to know what a glorious inheritance has been given to God's people. Other translations render this phrase, "what a glorious inheritance given to us in the saints," which gives the meaning that the inheritance Paul speaks about is the godly lives and examples of those who've gone before us.

And so we remember this day, and we give thanks, for those whose lives have affected ours, even those with whom we share no direct connection. For the truth is, we are connected. We are connected through Jesus.

As we come to the table this morning, let us come with gratitude for the inheritance we share. Not an inheritance of money, possessions, or power. But an inheritance of shared lives, and shared love. An inheritance of relationships that

cannot be severed even by death. An inheritance of being made one with all of those who have gone before us in death but who are very much alive to God. How rich we truly are. And so we pray, as we always do each week: “Give us grace to follow their good example, that we may become partakers of your heavenly kingdom.”

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.