

**New St. James Presbyterian Church, London, Ontario**  
**Sunday, November 18, 2018**  
**Rev. Dr. David Thompson**

**Missing the turn to second adulthood**

I speak to you in the name and for the sake of the one who gave you life...

“And Moses was a hundred and twenty years old when he died, and his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated.”

From St. Paul: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.

Two, elderly women, who had got to the stage in life when they frequently put the tea pot away in the refrigerator, decided to liven up their day and go out for a drive in their large car. As they were cruising along, they came to a major crossroad. The stoplight was red, but they just drove through it.

The woman in the passenger seat thought to herself: "I must be losing it. I could have sworn we just went through a red light." But she didn't say anything just in case.

After a few more minutes, they came to another major intersection and the light was red again. Again, they went right through.

The woman in the passenger seat was now getting more sure that the light had been red, but was also concerned now, that perhaps she was really losing it. At the next intersection, sure enough, the light was red and they went on through again!

This time, she turned to the other woman and said, "Sarah, did you know that we just ran through three red lights in a row? You could have killed us both!"

Sarah said; "Oh! Am I driving?"

When I was a child the Bible verse about Moses long life and strength fascinated me. It still does today. The Jews today say that Moses life was the "full compliment of years" for life expectancy.

Moses, like a giant sequoia, seemed to be different from all the other trees around him. He was old strong and vigorous. In my child like view of the world I put that down to some kind of a miracle. Now I'm not so sure.

In terms of averages the Japanese live the longest. The average baby girl born last year can expect to live to 86 years. The baby boys can expect to reach 80 years. Britain has 82.9 years for women and 79.2 years for men. In the US a woman who reaches 50 and is cancer free and has a good heart can expect to live to her 92<sup>nd</sup> year. A man healthy at 65 can expect to live to see 81 years. A baby girl born in the US has a one in three chance of living to 100 years.

Gail Sheehy's book New Passages argues that at age 45 we are looking at another 45 years of life- what she calls **the second adulthood**. But she says that we are just not prepared

to be living so long. She says that we are so ill prepared that many of us will miss the turn on the road to a vigorous second adulthood.

So how might we miss the turn in the road?

There are a number of factors. Smokers have a better than 50% chance of dying with a heart attack or stroke. If the heart attack doesn't kill us it will likely debilitate us. If the stroke doesn't kill us, then we may be paralyzed on one or other side of the body.

Alcoholism can do it too, damaging the liver and reducing quality of life.

A sedentary lifestyle propped up with junk food can do it as well. Failure to reduce stress levels can be another red light to drive through.

Some people give up on life too soon. I knew a man who thought he would die at age 76. Basically, after age 76 he sat on his couch waiting to die. He made it into his nineties, but **he did completely miss the turn to a vigorous second adulthood.**

Making the turn is all about **discipline**. It's about exercise, removing bad habits from our lives, understanding about good nutrition and discovering that we are spiritual beings who need to have our spirits fed not starved to death.

### **What could second adulthood look like?**

Well it could be the most exciting time of our lives! To get there we will need to jettison old ideas and images that we hold in our minds and replace them with new images. For instance, we could see old age as being full of vigor, spiritual dynamism and a zest for life.

### **Second adulthood done well is an age of mastery!**

Artists, musicians, physicians and surgeons, dentists, pilots, actors, chess players, pastors, teachers, farmers, mechanics, nurses- the list is endless, can reach mastery in this period of life. There is the potential of a sure confidence in our fifties and a trust of the self within the art or profession, that was not there before when we were younger.

I was watching an older man play tennis with a younger man. He was not as fast on his feet, but did he know where to place the ball. He won the match and the younger man was exhausted. He had encountered a master.

Moses lived his life in 3 forty- year periods. During them all, he was physically active. Shepherds have to be active. So, does a desert nomad. Moses climbed Sinai and even at his death we find him once more in the mountains. Dying at the height of his powers, he took his people as far as the promised land. Is he just exceptional or can others achieve his vitality?

There is a place in Russia where the traditional old age weakness concept never took root. The word old was banished and in its place the long living pursued an ageless lifestyle.

Deepak Chopra in his book *Ageless Body Timeless Mind* says that “ They galloped horse, worked under the sun, sang in choirs where the youngest member was seventy and the oldest 110. Abkhazians proved that getting older could be a time of improvement.”

When we get to age sixty this is what Gail Sheehy says can be possible:

She calls this stage in life **the age of Integrity**. There is a passage to it.

First of all, we have to reach for it. It doesn't just come to us. It involves a real investment of faith, risk and physical discipline

But she says it is well worth it!

It is an age of confidence. At this age we get a 360-degree view of life.

If we don't constantly repair the body and rebuild it, it will become rickety. Here is a fact to digest: **muscle can be trained at any age of life**. One bedridden man in his nineties, for an experiment, agreed to have an exercise bike strapped to the ceiling. His feet were tied into the pedals at first. He exercised faithfully every day and within three months was up and walking for several miles a day...Exercise seems to be the one non- medical elixir to retard aging. Long daily walks can be part of successful aging. Despite disabilities, (people in wheel chairs can exercise) we can find ways to exercise that work for us. The challenge is the discipline to do it! That is the hard part!

**The age of integrity**, 65 years and onward, Sheehy says is primarily a stage of spiritual growth. Instead of concentrating on time running out, it can be an exercise of living in the moment. The present never ages.

From a Biblical point of view let's remember the name of God means "I am" or the eternal present. God is.

**At this stage in life living like God in the present is vital.** She says stop postponing things. Live in the moment! Keep growing as a person!

What we are talking about today from this pulpit **is the stewardship of the life we have been given.**

Moses told his people " I set before you life and death...choose life!

Christ has a parable about two men. One built his house on sand. When the storms came, he lost his house. The other built his house on the rock. The storms came and beat upon the house and it stood.

All the great things in life come from discipline. Discipline is to build on rock. Building on sand is the undisciplined life.

Jan Thompson had lost the love of her life to death. She couldn't imagine spending Thanksgiving with anyone she knew. Giving thanks was completely beyond her. So, she went to a spa to spend time with complete strangers.

She had been caregiving for two years and was completely burned out. She hoped the Spa would help her to heal. In her mind she was just marking time until she could be once again with her beloved former husband Jack.

She asked the concierge if there was anyone who was recently bereaved who she could talk to.

The concierge said that the Spa director had lost her husband several months before.

So, Jan invited her to lunch the next day.

They quickly established common ground. Phyllis, the Spa director, had lost her husband to cancer.

However, she appeared to be the exact opposite to Jan. She was full of vitality and joy. She spoke of her plans to travel the world and all her plans for next year, with sparkling eyes.

So, Jan asked her “ Did you ever feel that you were just waiting to die?” Phyllis Said “ No. Never!”

When Jan looked incredulous, Phyllis told her about what happened to her in her first stages of life.

Phyllis and her family lived in Java where her father was an exec for Shell. One day Japanese soldiers came to the door and took her father away with a bayonet pointed at his back. Her mother, brother and Phyllis were all taken to a prison camp.

For three years they all but starved to death and Phyllis ended her story by saying that every day her mother said to her “ They can take away our food and our freedom...but they can't take away our love of life! If we let them do that then they have won!”

“And that is why as awful as it was to lose my husband and that I have to go on without him, **I will never lose my love of life!”**

Jan looked hard at this 64-year-old woman, who was at the age of integrity and possible confidence in herself and mastery. Then she thought of all this woman had been through, so much more than Jan had endured and **yet she had decided to fully live her life.**

Jan suddenly had a picture of what she might be like at age 64. Which did she want to be? An inspiring joyful woman with peace and love in her heart and a deep love of life... or a woman in a cocoon. sitting on the sidelines, full of sorrow, not really living but merely existing?

Jan left the spa radically changed. **She had made the turn to second adulthood by choosing to live her life fully,** honoring the gift of a good marriage through her memory of it, but also moving on to experience life in the now, as it is moment by moment. A sense of peace and contentment filled her with a zest for LIFE!

She had discovered what St. Paul meant when he said, “I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.”

I close today with a toast to us all from the Abkhasians. It is this “ May you live as long as Moses.”

That is my personal toast to everyone here today: May you live as long as Moses and as well. May your eyes be bright and your natural force unabated.

So much of our vitality is on the area of choice, and what is not, the wise person leaves up to God, who if we did but recognize it, is always the Wind beneath our wings!