

**Better Than the Alternative, by Daniel H. Kuhn, Jr. 20071014**  
**2 Kings 5:9-17 and Luke 17:11-19**  
**Elon Community Church, United Church of Christ, 14 October, 2007**

I know I'm getting old when I begin to worry if the saying that the good die young is really true. I know I'm getting old when retirement homes begin to proposition me. I know I'm getting old when the neckties I bought as a teenager are back in style. The older I get, the more difficult it is to blow out all of my birthday candles. Restaurants and vacation theme parks think the elderly have reached their second childhood. Senior citizens pay the same discounted rate as for children.

Aging is a problem all of us face. That is not a bad problem when we consider that it is better than the alternative. Many of these thoughts come from Dr. Charles Schmitz, minister of a former church of mine. He said God was very wise in designing us. As we age, our bodies deteriorate. We get more wrinkles and gray hair. We are not as attractive as we once were. At the same time, our eyes get weaker. This allows us to say, "Dear, you look as beautiful as you were on the day we married."

Charlie went into a big box store to buy an appliance he needed for the kitchen. The salesperson took a look at his wrinkled face and said, "This appliance is guaranteed for life!" Usually, there is no indication as to whose life the guarantee applies.

One day, Charlie was driving down a dead end street and a cop stopped him and noticed his appearance, and then said, "You're going the right way!" Actually, Charlie was planning to park at the end of the street and go for a walk in the park that had an entrance there.

God's wisdom continues. Charlie said that God designed forgetfulness in the elderly because God knew they need exercise. He was reading in his den downstairs. He remembered that he needed something and he started upstairs to get it. When he got upstairs, he forgot what it was he went for. He went back downstairs. There, he remembered what he needed, and he began the process over again.

I mention Charlie because he had a wonderful, positive attitude toward aging. He considered himself a refugee from youth, not a deserter. He said that our basic faith changes every twenty years. Think about it. Our childhood faith changed as we went to high school and college and learned to think and reason for ourselves. In our middle years, as we watched our children grow and mature, faith took on different meanings. As we near sixty, we rethink all of the goals of life— the ones we won't attain, and which ones are really important. At eighty, faith is entirely new. The years have brought new experiences that have matured the faith. Each score of years creates changes within.

Handling the later years well is a matter of attitude. The choice is ours: do we have faith or doubt? Hope or despair? Courage or fear? The pessimist will be upset that the restaurant gives senior discounts, treating him as a child. The optimist will be grateful for the opportunity to go shopping or be entertained at a reduced cost.

This relates to the story of the ten lepers in the Gospel of Luke who were cured of leprosy. One came back and thanked Jesus. Who was he? A Samaritan. He was a twotime loser— a double outcast. He had a terrible disease and was prevented from living in the city. He was a Samaritan— a foreigner— from the area we today call the West bank. This has always been a disputed area.

All ten lepers were cured of their disease, but only this one was made whole. He was thankful. His gratitude made him well — more than simply cured of a disease. The Greek word for

well here is σωζω (sozo) and means healed, whole, or saved! Our proper relationship with God is a relationship of thankfulness.

Thank God we are aging! Each day gives us new wisdom and new perspectives. As we get older, we understand God's will better. Our eyesight gets worse. Why? For years, our eyes have been a source of temptation. We see money and we want it. We see new styles, and we want to buy. We see the opposite sex, and we're tempted. We have learned to judge life by appearances. With failing eyesight, we learn slowly but surely that the unseen world is better. It's eternal. We begin to see God.

Our hearing gets worse. Why? Consider the frustration our ears cause. We pay too much attention to gossip, trivia, and meaningless voices around us. With failing hearing, we find trust and confidence in the still small voice of the eternal God.

Our memory gets worse. Why? Our memories are too cluttered with experiences and we dwell in the past. They poison us with bitter unforgiving attitudes. With failing memory, we forget the negative incidents of life. Quoting Paul, "forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus."<sup>1</sup>

Our energy lessens. Why? When we're young, we have lots of energy and think we can do most everything. We even think we can save ourselves if we just work hard enough. With failing energy, we realized we are not saved by our work; we are saved by faith.

Death nears. Why? We realize that all that is evil dies; all that is good lives on forever. Let death come for you and me, for that is the only way we can experience resurrection and life in its fullest. The physical parts of the body like our eyes and ears wear out with age. The eternal parts will never wear out: the self; the soul; and the spirit.

They get better with age.

Let us follow the example of the grateful leper. Thank God for aging. Thank God for life.

---

<sup>1</sup>Philippians 3:13-14