

Thanks...it's an honor...being a PK here...You've all truly been like family. Growing up at Carbondale has been like having lots of extra aunts and uncles and grandmas and grandpas.

It's a tradition in our family that at any special birthday or occasion dad will write Bek or me a letter. The point of this letter is to make us cry our eyes out in the middle of the celebratory event. Bek and I have adopted this policy as well and at this point all of our family cards are also meant to have this emotional reaction. So today I thought I would write a letter to commemorate this anniversary.

Dear Dad,

A few weeks ago I was told that the church would be honoring you for getting old and having served this incredible church for 25 years. Bek and I talked about it and we thought why the fuss? Lots of people work at the same place their entire career and they don't even get cake much less a whole church service dedicated to them. And as awesome as you are we see it as someone who remained faithful to God and the call on their life – isn't that what we're supposed to do? But then I started thinking about the reasons why Bek and I would honor you as our dad and it became clear that many of those reasons must be the same as why we honor you as pastor.

You're the most honest and transparent person I know. I'm sure people wonder if you're "like this all the time." Does he just sit down and play the piano like that at home? Yes, usually during a tv show that Bek and I are trying to watch – that's when he plays and sings the loudest. But, the truth is you are. You're the same person in the pulpit that you are in the middle of the day at home. And that's why I think the qualities that Bek and I appreciate in you as dad are the same as those appreciated by the people who fill up these pews week after week.

You quote Princess Bride lines and various other movies at home so it makes sense to me that you would carry that into the pulpit.

You've set with Bek and me many a day and night when we were sick and it calmed us. So it makes sense that the people of Carbondale would want that too.

When I don't feel well the first thing I want is for my dad to pray for me. So it makes sense that the people of Carbondale would want to be prayed for by you as well.

When I'm stressed and have a problem and need direction and God seems quiet to me I call you from any number of states and countries and you help me. So it makes sense to me why the people of Carbondale call you for help too.

When I'm not sure how to interpret Lost or a scripture from the Bible I ask you and you know everything. So it makes sense why the people of Carbondale look to you for wisdom and instruction too.

When I need to laugh or cry you join right in. It's good to know I'm not alone in the journey of life. So it makes sense why the people of Carbondale come to you in all the stages of life in good times and bad – because they need someone to do life with too.

You taught me and Bek how to grieve and how to long for Heaven. So it makes sense to me why the people of Carbondale want you beside them at the bedside of a loved one as they draw their final breath.

You love me and Bek and want the best for us so much that you worry yourself silly. So it makes sense to me why you do that for the people of Carbondale whom God also entrusted to your care.

Yes it seems to me that the qualities of father, shepherd, and pastor are much the same. And, Bek and I are honored to call you all three. And so after further thought, it does make sense to me why we honor you for 25 years of faithful service to this church full of extra kids. That's what the body of Christ is, right? Brothers and sisters. After 30 years of growing in this church I know that's true. We're all family.

Thank you for staying committed to Christ, to Carbondale and to your call for 25 years. Oh, and, Happy Birthday, Dad.

Well, I got a call on skype in the middle of March telling me the plans for this day and that the board had asked that I speak and to keep it a secret from my dad. So for the last almost 2 months this day and this sermon has not been too far from my thoughts. I've stressed myself out trying to come up with something to say and agonized over whether or not this made any sense at all or if it was just my random thoughts. You see I almost never write a sermon that I don't call my dad and run it by him for theological soundness and general make "senseness". Doing this on my own has been a challenge. I couldn't decide if I should focus my thoughts toward dad or on

pastor/shepherd themes or on leadership or on Carbondale itself. But none of that seemed right. Was I supposed to honor or roast my dad in this sermon? Base the sermon on him and all that he does or focus my thoughts on what has been accomplished during his tenure? And in the end I've gone with none of that and yet in some ways a combination of all of that. I told you this wasn't going to make sense.

I've titled this sermon – **Rediscovering a faithful life** – because I was under the impression that you had to rediscover something in order to preach from this pulpit. This morning I want to look at the 3 things I thanked my dad for staying faithful to earlier because there are lessons in there for all of us.

1. The first thing is – **Faithful to Carbondale.**

My dad is always talking about the history of this church. If you don't know that 11 years ago we had a tornado or that 25 years ago the pastor here was Bro. McQueen then we'd like to welcome you here as our guest this morning and invite you back next week when the preaching will be better. My dad is proud of the heritage that Carbondale has and rightly so. In 2008 my dad preached a sermon called "Remember Your Leaders." His text was from Hebrews 13:7-8 and I want to borrow that text to use as my own this morning. That verse reads: "**Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.**" Firstly this morning I want to focus on the first 3 words. **Remember your leaders.** In my dad's sermon he listed off all of the former pastors from the past 75 years and went into detail about the pastor's that he had met personally. That list looks like this:

1. **A pioneer spirit. (Rev. H.T. Owens)**
2. **Sound doctrine and Pentecostal zeal (Rev. F.C. Cornell)**
3. **Missions (Rev. Eric Johnson)**
4. **Christian Education (Rev. R.G. Helvey)**
5. **Evangelism and Outreach (Rev. H.D. Pieratt)**
6. **Compassionate care and encouragement of the hurting (Rev. J.L. McQueen)**

In 1 Corinthians 3 there was some arguing over who they should follow – Paul or Apollos – and Paul says, **“What is Apollos? What is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe – as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow.”** And then a few verses later goes on to say that, **“By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation ... and someone else is building on it.”** The men on that list (**show list again**) laid a foundation but my dad built something on it. And I think that if they were here today they would say “wow, look how Carbondale grew as you watered it and tended it. Look what you built on our foundation.” Bro. Owens might say - Look at how in the last 25 years you’ve continued to pioneer by planting 2 new churches, starting a service just for young adults, seeing the youth group double and triple itself through the incredible staff that serve this great church. Bro. Cornell might say – Look at how this church has stayed true to Pentecostal doctrine and sound teaching and how you’ve studied and prepared yourself to teach theological truths. Bro. Johnson might say – you mean in your 25 years as pastor you’ve sent out 5 missionaries that grew up in your church plus sent out youth pastors across the state of Oklahoma and beyond? Bro. Helvey might say – who would of thought that you’d be offering this many Sunday School classes, and small groups, and discipleship classes. Who would have believed that over 25

years you would have opened your church to teach new ministers and pastors. Bro. Pieratt might say look at all that has been accomplished through outreach and evangelism with the missions trips that are taken and the things done to partner with the local schools. Bro. McQueen would say look what you've accomplished - by the grace of God this truly has become a place of healing, hope, laughter, and peace for those who were wounded or hurting.

This morning we "Remember our leaders" as we build on their foundation and water the seeds they sowed. Over the last 25 years my dad has been faithful to remember and honor the former leaders of this church and has built on their strong foundation.

But Carbondale isn't what it is just because of my dad. He alone doesn't make up Carbondale Assembly – we are Carbondale. And what are we doing as a congregation to help water these plants and continue building on the foundation that has been laid? What are we doing to continue pioneering new ministries and support missions and teach and train children and teenagers and new believers? What are we doing to embrace those that are hurting and need encouragement? Who are we sharing the love of Jesus with on a regular basis? Are we faithful to serve our brothers and sisters in this church and the people of our community? We remember our leaders and build on their legacy.

2. Faithful to his call – "Who spoke the word of God to you."

My entire life my dad has said to me – guard your heart and guard your call. For 25 years my dad has faithfully guarded his call to pastor this church. But for even longer

than 25 years he's been guarding the call to serve the Lord. He was just a child when God called him to preach and gifted him to sing and play the piano. His entire life he's been using his gifts to share the love and mercy of Jesus with people. In 2 Timothy 4, Paul gives this charge to Timothy, **"Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suite their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry."** My dad has been faithful to do just that – to preach the word and teach sound doctrine. He has studied and prepared himself to fulfill the call that was placed on his life. And we honor him for that today.

But the truth is all of us have been called and have we been faithful to do what the Lord has asked us to do? **1 Peter 4:10** says, **"Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ."** We may not all be charged to preach the word through a sermon but we've all been called to live a life that will point others to Jesus. And we'll do that by using whatever gift we have received to serve others. What gifts have we been given that we should be using to serve the church and serve the world? There's a million ways to get involved in the life and ministry of this

church and beyond. Last week my dad preached about the body of Christ and that we need each other and each part of this body. We need your gifts and abilities. It will take all of us working together to reach our city. We don't need 500 people to sing or 500 people to preach or 500 people to work construction. We need each person doing their part – people to clean up schools and people to plant flowers, people to deliver meals and people to visit shut ins, people to lead worship and people to cook food on Wednesdays, people to invite their friends to church and people to drive a van that will bring them here, people to work in children's church and people to hold babies in the nursery. We need everyone being faithful to their own call from the Lord. Because all of us have been called to do something, go somewhere, and tell someone the good news of Jesus. All of us.

I get calls in my office all the time from people who decide to not go on one of our trips because they just decided not to or because they weren't feeling it. There are a lot of legitimate reasons mixed in but our favorites are the ones who don't really feel like they're supposed to go. So our joke in the office is – oh, so the great commission's not for you since you weren't feeling it. It's not about "feeling it" it's about being obedient to what God has called us to do and that is to reach our world.

All of us are called to go into our world. Are we fulfilling the call on our lives and being faithful to do what we've been asked to do by the Lord?

3. Faithful to Christ – “Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and forever.”

My dad has been faithful to this church and faithful to his call, but more important than that he's been faithful to Christ, his Savior and Lord. **1 Corinthians 11 says, "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ."** That's the life that we are to imitate. We don't just remember and follow the example of our leaders who spoke the word of God to us simply because they were good people and they seemed to do okay in this life. We are following their example as they follow the example of Christ – that's the life we are imitating – the life of Christ. As good as my dad is it's not enough. It's not about being good or coming to church or simply using your gifts and talents for the Lord. It's about making a commitment to Christ – one that says along with Paul, **"I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ."**

Above all else it's about knowing Christ. It's one thing to know that he was born of the virgin Mary, or to know that he walked on this earth for 33 years and performed miracles and healed the sick and raised the dead. It's one thing to know in your head that he died upon a cross for our sins and that 3 days later he rose again. But, do you know him personally, because that will make all the difference in your life. To know him as a friend who sticks closer than a brother. To know him as the one who never leaves us or forsakes us. To know that your sins are forgiven not because of righteous things that you have done but because of his mercy – do you know him like that? Do you know what it is to walk with the Lord every day relying on his grace and mercy and love? Being a part of this great church won't save you from your sins but coming to Jesus and falling upon his great mercy will. Receiving forgiveness from the Lord and living your life for Christ is the only life worth living.

Are you faithfully serving Christ?

A few weeks ago I met a friend for coffee. She and I had at one time worked together at the same church and we had worked together on events for the last several years. We met that night to talk because she's walked away from her church and her call and now Christ. The reason is that in her mind it got too hard. She told the Lord if you're not going to give me things that I want that's fine but I'll walk away from it all and get those things myself. And so that's what she's done. She said – I think about you often Sarah but I couldn't do it. And then she said – do you think you'll regret it? And I said – regret living for God? Being faithful to the call of God and the cause of Christ? I said – No, knowing that some kid in Europe came to know Jesus because I brought a team and they heard for the first time. This is about eternity so no, I won't regret living my life for the Lord.

And if you asked my mom this morning who gave her life to the Lord at a young age and has served Him all her life, she's been faithful to Carbondale and has served this church in many ways and has stood beside my dad through good and bad as the pastor of this church for 25 years, she's been faithful to the call of God having gone to Bible College to prepare herself, and faithful to Christ. And if you asked her this morning do you regret it she would say - ?

If you asked my dad – do you regret remaining faithful to Carbondale and the Call of God and Christ all these years he would say - ?

Because a life lived faithfully for Christ is the only life that matters. How are you living yours? Are you living your life in such a way that people will remember you and want to imitate your faith – your example as you follow the example of Christ? Are you living

your life with Christ as the focus knowing that it's only by His mercy we are saved? How are you living your life? Are you being faithful? Because you can start today – start today connecting to this church and getting involved. Start today using your gifts and abilities to bring others to Christ. Start today to truly live your life for Christ and make it count. This morning has been about honoring my dad but in the end there's nothing extra ordinary about him – he's just one guy who said yes to Jesus as a child. He dedicated his life to serving him and look at the impact that has made. Where's the next Phil Taylor – who will say today – I'll give my life totally and completely to the Lord. I'll be faithful to Christ and I'll make a difference.

Pray – if there is anyone here who hasn't made Christ the reason for their life – who hasn't yet known His mercy in a personal way – you can do that today as I'm praying.