

Sunday, October 30
9:00am | 11:00am

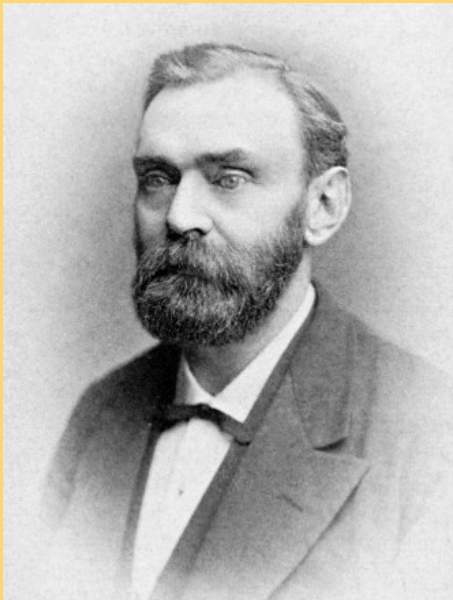
Church
MATTERS
2023 Generosity Campaign

*Blessed
to be a
Blessing*

Sermon for Sunday, October 30, 2022
“Blessed to Be a Blessing” | Reformation Sunday
Charlie Berthoud | Genesis 12:1-2

When I say the name “Nobel” what do you think of? Many of us think of the Nobel prizes that are given each year for achievement in medicine, literature, peacemaking, and more.

A Swedish man named Alfred Nobel is responsible for these prizes, and for the generous financial gifts that go with the prizes. But we might not have the Nobel Prize if it weren't for a newspaper mistake.



Alfred Nobel
and the Nobel Prize



Nobel was born in 1833 and over the course of his life, he invented many things, getting over 350 patents, and his most famous invention is dynamite.

In 1888, his brother died, but somehow word got out incorrectly, and many newspapers published obituaries for Alfred.

One headline read: "The merchant of death is dead." And the article said: "Dr. Alfred Nobel, who became rich by finding ways to kill more people faster than ever before, died yesterday."

Saddened by this summary of his life, Nobel decided to change the narrative, almost as if he got a second chance to write his own obituary.

With the large amount of money that he had accumulated, he established a foundation for the Nobel Prizes. And perhaps the best known of those prizes is the Nobel Prize for Peace. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alfred_Nobel

Because of that wake-up call with the obituary, he was able to redirect his energy and priorities, so now he is remembered for being an advocate for medicine, literature, science, and peace.

* * * * *

How about you? Have you ever thought about how you're going to be remembered?

Have you ever thought about what will be in your obituary, or what will be said at your funeral?

Sometimes when a person gets a terminal diagnosis of many months, they begin to write their own obituary, as a way of reflecting back on their life. This can open up all sorts of conversation and reflection in the final months of life.

What if we took that a step further?

All of us are going to die one day, so today is as good a day as any to think about the direction our lives are taking. It's Commitment Sunday—and yes that commitment is at least partially about our pledges to support Covenant for next year. But it's also a good time to renew our commitment to God and to living purposefully, to get back on track, if we've gotten off track.

- What will your obituary say about you?
- What kind of impact or legacy will you leave?
- How are you going to live your life?

As poet Mary Oliver wrote: “What is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?”

As Christians, we’re called to follow Jesus, to live as children of God’s kingdom—a new reality of justice and righteousness, where God’s love permeates everything. As God’s children, we yearn to live with the fruit of the spirit:

“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.” (Galatians 5.22-23)

As God’s children, we learn from the commission given to Abram and Sarai, to help us think about our lives. God sent them to journey with a purpose and gave them a blessing to share. Listen for God’s word:

“Now the Lord said to Abram, ‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.’”

Blessed to be a blessing. It’s a great way to understand our faith, and it’s a great way to live.

This month our series has focused on money matters and life matters and church matters, inviting us to think about how we are spending our money and our time, encouraging us to think about the things that really matter, and pondering how we can be generous with our time, talent, and treasure.

I’ve been seeing lots of generosity on social media in recent months.



I am one of the millions of followers of Zachery Dereniowski, also known as MDmotivator. As a medical student, he struggled with mental health. During the pandemic, he started reaching to care for people. He offered hugs to strangers who were struggling. Then he started sharing money. He'd ask a homeless person for a dollar to two, and if they said yes, he would thank them and then give them \$500 or \$1000.



And there's another popular social media influencer who goes by Jimmy Darts. He who gives away money to people who are kind. In one video, he's at a discount superstore, and he asks random people if they would rather have \$1000 for themselves, or \$10,000 to give to someone else. The first two people gratefully take the \$1000, with one of them mentioning that her sister just had a premature baby. The third person decides to give it away, so he finds a young mother and gives her the \$10,000. Then Jimmy says to the third person because you were so nice, here's \$10,000 for you.

These videos are wildly popular. Not everything on social media is nonsense. I'd like to think that videos like this are helping young people discover the joy of generosity, a core value of the Christian faith.

Here at Covenant, we have so many great examples of people who have been generous with their time, talent, and treasure, living out their faith, recognizing the ways they'd been blessed and finding ways to generously be a blessing to others. Every time we walk in this sanctuary, we pass a list of our charter members—people who came together in the mid-1950s with a dream of a congregation in this neighborhood. Because of their hard work, determination, generosity, and prayerfulness, our church is here today.

I only knew a few of these charter members, but I have a sense all of them knew that they were blessed to be a blessing.



Charter Members:

Mr. & Mrs. Thomas J. Arbogast	Mr. & Mrs. David J. Ohnstad
Mr. & Mrs. Franklyn F. Bright	Mr. & Mrs. Douglas Osterheld
Mr. & Mrs. Francis A. Brewster	Mr. & Mrs. Russell E. Pleune
Dr. & Mrs. Archer F. Crosley, Jr.	Ms. Ann F. Pleune
Mr. & Mrs. Myron Davies	Mr. Peter F. Pleune
Mr. & Mrs. Jack Densmore	Mr. John R. Pleune
Mr. & Mrs. Robert Dick	Mr. & Mrs. Gordon B. Reuhl
Mr. & Mrs. Arlan W. McClurkin	Dr. & Mrs. A.L. Rhoades
Mr. & Mrs. Elmer B. McMurry	Mr. & Mrs. Robert M. Rieser, Jr.
Ms. Marilyn McMurry	Mr. & Mrs. William J. Rundle
Mr. & Mrs. Charles E. Meyer	Mr. & Mrs. L. Reed Tripp
Mr. & Mrs. Floyd E. Moeller	Ms. Beatrice A. Walton

I wonder if they ever imagined that their generosity would still have an impact

almost 70 years later. Next time you walk past that list of names, offer a prayer of thanks for them.

We also go to Bradfield Hall pretty regularly, a wonderful place that was named for Irwin Bradfield, the synod executive in the 1950s, who according to the plaque gave “spiritual inspiration and warm personal interest to the congregation during its formative years.”

I don’t know a lot of the details of his work, but if had simply gone through the motions of his job and done the bare minimum, without a sense of God’s spirit or warm personal interest, I don’t think this church wouldn’t be here today.

In my ten years here, I’ve gotten to know a lot of the saints who have gone before us, and I’ve officiated at many of their memorial services. I give thanks to God for the lives of the saints who’ve gone before us, people who have been very generous with their time, talent, and treasure—for this church, for this community, and for the world.

I want to share three examples.



Bob Lorenz

Twelve of us just got back from an inspiring week in Guatemala. Covenant has had a partnership there for 20 years, in large part because of the work of Bob and Sally Lorenz. Bob died a few years ago, and he is fondly remembered in Guatemala. One family has his picture on the wall of their house.

He is fondly remembered at UW where he taught, he is lovingly remembered by his family, and he is beloved in this church for his warmth and smile, for his passion for Guatemala, Habitat for Humanity, for making this world a better place.

Bob recognized the ways he had been blessed by God and he found many ways to be a blessing to others.



Helen Birkemeier died just a few weeks ago. She served as organist here at Covenant for a long time, making a joyful noise for thousands of people. She also volunteered with music therapy and was a foster parent to several kids.

I have gotten to know her over my time here mostly at funeral receptions. She and her husband Bill—who died last December—came here regularly from their home in Spring Green for funerals of Covenant members, to pay their respects, to offer encouragement and support. It was like comforting the mourners became their ministry. They

always seemed to have a smile on their face and a kind word for everyone. Helen and Bill were blessed, and they were blessings to many.



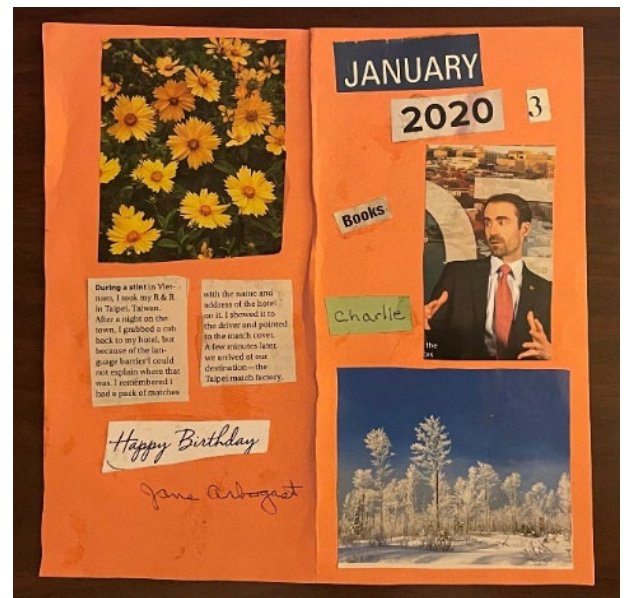
Jane Arbogast was a charter member here, along with her husband Tom. She held many leadership positions in the church and in her later years she helped out in the office on a regular basis.

She was a prominent member of our Care Team, and she was just a good and caring person. One way she showed her caring was with homemade birthday cards. She had three children, seven grandchildren, ten great grandchildren, and five great-great grandchildren. They all

got homemade birthday cards, with photos, words, and more from various magazines. She usually included a photo of a celebrity who resembled the birthday person. She must have worked very hard on these cards.

I and a few other non-family people were lucky enough to get on the list, and I treasure the one in January 2020, just three months before she died with Covid.

It's orange, my favorite color, and there is a very handsome young man, who she apparently thought looks like me! Thank you, Jane!



Here at Covenant, we are blessed with examples of people who learned the good news of God's love for each of us and all the world, and with that knowledge they lived lives of purpose and meaning—with mission, music, birthday cards, and more. On this Commitment Sunday, I hope you renew and deepen your commitment to welcoming and sharing the Good News of God's love. If you can make a financial pledge to support our ministry here, I hope you will.

More important than any financial gift is making a commitment to live a God-inspired life, a life of meaning and purpose, a life of faith, hope and love. A life where you are generous with your time, your talent, and your treasure.

God loves us. How will we respond? I'd like to close with the words of the song we'll sing in a minute.

*Lord of all good, our gifts we bring to you;
use them your holy purpose to fulfill,
tokens of love and pledges brought anew,
that our whole life is offered to your will.*

Amen.