

Sermon Title: **The Great Cloud of Witnesses-Part 1**

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Vessel: Russ LaFlamme

Scripture Reference: **Hebrews 12:1-2**

Thesis: **The writer of Hebrews points to the great cloud of witnesses that have gone before them as motivation for our own walk with Jesus;**

Purpose: **Today, we are looking at some of our past witnesses that have gone before us here in Waterville who have advanced the work of Christ in our community.**

Key Word: "The Church"

I) Introduction:

Scripture Reading is: **Hebrews 12:1-2**

A) The Setting:

- 1) **Illustration: When I was a lot younger and my children were small we bought an old house that needed a lot of work.**
 - (a) One of the first areas that we tackled was the remodeling of the kitchen and bathroom.
 - (b) Now, I have done a lot of things and understand the basics of building construction.
 - (c) I also know my limits.
- 2) **One of the areas that I needed help with is plumbing.**
 - (a) I have found that with plumbing, it always leads me to more trouble.
 - (b) I have done minor plumbing repairs and had convinced myself that if I put in new pipes I could do this job myself.
- 3) **Back then most piping was done with copper.**
 - (a) So, this is what I set out to do; however, once I had soldered all my pipes and turned the water on; I have a few leaks.
 - (b) Now, the system was wet and I knew as it was after supper time; that I was in trouble.
- 4) **So, what I did was call a friend who was better at this and asked for help.**
 - (a) I needed some encouragement ...
 - (b) and someone who has gone before to lead me through mess I was in.
- 5) **I believe this is the intent of Hebrews, chapter 11 and 12.**
 - (a) Hebrews 11, gives us a list of a great cloud of witnesses of faith; a faith Hall of Fame if you will.
 - (b) Hebrews 12 points its readers to look back and remember how God has faithfully kept all His promises to those who trusted in Him.
 - (c) **So, let's look at our scripture reading in Hebrews 12:1-2.**

B) *Sermon Prayer*

II) The hook:

- A) **Just as the writer of Hebrews points the readers back to remember God's faithfulness and the faith of His appointed leaders of the Bible; I think it would be good for us to begin our year of celebrating for 200 years by reviewing over this first month some of the leaders and events from our history that have shaped who we are and some of the significant events of our past.**

- 1) As you probably already know our church was organized by Rev. Jeremiah Chaplin, who was the First President of what is now known as Colby College in 1818 which first began as a College of Theological Studies as part of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.
- 2) Formal secession and formation of the state of Maine as the 23rd state occurred on March 15, 1820, as part of the Missouri Compromise, which geographically limited the spread of slavery and enabled the admission to statehood of Missouri the following year, keeping a balance between slave and free states.
- 3) **Also in this year George Dana Boardman was baptized; he was the first graduate of the College and became this church's first foreign missionary.**

- (a) In 1824 the First Baptist Society was organized becoming a legal entity to hold property.
- (b) The Society sold pews to finance the meeting house.
- 4) In 1826 the Meeting house was completed at a cost of less than \$4,000.
- 5) This church has had a rich history of faithful witnesses who should encourage us to live up to their legacy.
- B) My sharing's are NOT intended to be chronological order; but rather a sampling as led by God's Spirit to challenge and encourage us as members of this great church serving God's kingdom for 200 years.
- C) **I want to begin by sharing from a book published with bulletins and other events for the year beginning with May 1, 1949 through April 30, 1950.**
 - 1) This was a significant time in the life of this church which paved the way for many improvements and progress of 1951 when our church received its latest significant upgrades.
 - 2) The church was in need of several renovations as it was, after all, 123 years old at this time.
 - 3) There was no high pulpit or lectern; only a large open platform with a small movable pulpit which today is out in the back hall.
- D) **It is only three years since the end of World War II.**
 - 1) Truman was president.
 - 2) NATO, the North American Treaty Organization, is formed by the United States, Canada, and ten Western European nations; the treaty stated that any attack against one nation would be considered an attack against them all.

TS: **So, how did this church make such significant changes . . .**

III) Body: (Key Points)

- A) Key Point #1: **Kenneth Lloyd Garrison, was the pastor at this time and out of all the weeks of bulletins in this book; this is the only record sermon that they wanted to make sure was included. It is titled "The Cathedral of My Soul."** (Pastor Garrison speaks metaphorically referring to Paul's **first letter to the Corinthians 6:19-20**) (NASB) **"Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you; whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?²⁰ For you have been bought with a price: therefore, glorify God in your body. "And so, please let me share this message with you:**
 - 1) Every now and then there is a resurgence of the old Protestant cry for a moratorium on preaching. So, for this one Sunday we are observing such a moratorium. Instead of preaching to you today, I am going to tell you about THE CATHEDRAL OF MY SOUL. I know that you will understand if I speak in the first person singular – because I am talking about my cathedral.
 - 2) You also have a Cathedral; each one of you. Some of you have told me about yours. Others have not told me, but someday I know that you will.
 - 3) **The Cathedral of My Soul was built upon the Past!** All of the wisdom and character of yesterday went into its construction. It thus imbibed all of the Past's nobility and goodness. But, in spite of the fact that my Cathedral was built upon the contributions of yesterday, IT WAS PURPOSEFULLY CONSTRUCTED TO MEET THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE FUTURE.
 - 4) **I have niches in the Cathedral of My Soul.** All around my Cathedral's walls are little shelf-like indentations on which rest the images of my friends. Friends who helped me build my Cathedral. Nearly everyone I have known is there; some in prominent places; others less conspicuous. Very near the front of my Cathedral rests the spiritual likeness of a great man who was my Seminary teacher. He taught me about the greatness of the human soul, and how I must keep my own soul clean and reverent. He it was who

stirred my mind, and taught me how to reach God. Oh! I know! His soul has long since gone to be with God, but never-the-less, he is in the Cathedral of My Soul.

Upon another niche is a boyhood friend, whose wholesome companionship enriched my soul. Upon another niche rests one whom nearly all of you would know were I to mention his name. Everyone of you has a resting place, somewhere, in the Cathedral of My Soul.

- 5) **I have windows in the Cathedral of My Soul.** They were carefully and selectively inserted by my mother and father. Through their glassed apertures shines the light which illuminates my Cathedral. Even on the darkest days, rays of gold, red and yellow stream through these colorful windows and beautify my soul.
- 6) **I have a light in the Cathedral of My Soul.** The light comes from a LONELY BOOK – too little read; much misunderstood; rarely followed. A Book in which I read: “My word shall be a lamp unto thy feet.” A Book given to all mankind as a guide and directive for a distraught and selfish world.
- 7) **I have a cross in the Cathedral of My Soul.** Not a beautiful cross of gold or silver or precious jewels. My cross is dark, and black and hideous to look upon. Stained with blood; and when I touch it, my body, mind and spirit is torn by agonizing pain.
- 8) **I have a Christ in the Cathedral of My Soul.** He is not a crucified man – but a RISEN LORD. He walks by my side in the Cathedral of My Soul. Sometimes I call him Friend, sometimes Master, sometimes Teacher; but whatever I call Him, and whenever, -- He is there, and I confidently walk hand in hand with Him.
- 9) **I have a priest in the Cathedral of My Soul.** I AM THAT PRIEST! I prepare my Cathedral for worship! I administer the sacraments! I read the Book! I deliver the spiritual ultimatums! I wear the full vestments of my office. Many times, I look down upon the robe I wear, and find it stained and soiled, and unworthy of my office. Perhaps you have noticed it, and have felt that you would like to help me clean my robe? Have you? You might try, but you cannot help me. There are only two people who can make my robe pure white and resplendent. I AM ONE. And how do I clean my robe you ask? Why, with tears and blood! The tears are mine!
- 10) **I have music in the Cathedral of My Soul.** The music is played by one to whom I gave my heart – it seems but yesterday. One who took her place beside me, and dedicated her life too, in complete service to my living Lord. She floods the Cathedral of My Soul with lovely music. **Always, you ask?** No, it's not always beautiful, for sometimes I inject involuntarily, a quality of thought or word or action which causes discord. But when I enter the Cathedral of My Soul in the proper spirit, the music is heavenly.
- 11) **I have a candle on the altar of the Cathedral of My Soul.** That candle is my daughter. She illuminates my Cathedral from its very front to the most inaccessible corners. Her little flickering flame gives an air of mystery and reverence, and magnifies a thousand times, the happiness in the Cathedral of My Soul.
- 12) **There is a tower in the Cathedral of My Soul.** It is built majestically upon the bulwark of my faith; four-square, high, commanding. Its steeple penetrates the blue heaven of God, and through its inner stairway, winding always upward, I ascend to heights unknown.
- 13) **I have a bell in the tower of the Cathedral of My Soul.** It is unlike any other bell you ever saw or heard. Its joyful resonance resounds the immortal spirits of those I love, and whom I have loved and lost awhile. NO, I AM NOT THE BELL-RINGER in my Cathedral. My friends ring it. Every time they smile at me, or whisper “friend”, or hold out a helping hand; the bell peals out in unequivocal tones of clearness and invitation. And every time it rings, day or night, there is worship in my Cathedral.
- 14) **There are paths leading to the Cathedral of my Soul.** Not one or two, but the paths are many. They come from every direction and converge at my Cathedral. Some paths are smooth and easily traveled; others are rough and difficult to follow; some are direct; others are winding. But to those who follow the paths, devotedly and with faith; each path leads unmistakably to the Cathedral of My Soul.

- 15) **There are doors to the Cathedral of My Soul.** Highly arched doors; front doors of unlimited width; side doors through which the humble slip unnoticed; rear doors, small doors. But each gives entrance and invitation to worship in the Cathedral of My Soul.
- 16) **There are people crowding into the Cathedral of My Soul.** They are pushing, shoving, milling about in utter confusion. Their voices are high-pitched and inharmonious as they reach me from the distance. But as they come closer I can distinguish what they are chanting; "life...Life...LIFE! We want life! Give us life!"
- 17) **There is a foundation to the Cathedral of My Soul.** Not a foundation temporal, of brick and native rock. My Cathedral is founded upon THE ROCK. A rock, that though all Hell should prevail against it, will never, no never, let my Cathedra; fall.
- 18) **Yes, there is a presence, a holy presence in the Cathedral of My Soul.** A presence like unto God Himself. I cannot adequately describe Him to you. I can only invite you to come and worship with me, and then you too will meet Him and know Him and love Him as I do in the Cathedral of My Soul.
- 19) **Well, I have tried to tell you about the Cathedral of My Soul.** I have tried not to be prosaic or dull; but perhaps I have tackled a pretty large order for any man – for who can measure God.
- 20) **I have tried to tell you humbly and simply, and in my heart, is a prayer that you will also think about the CATHEDRAL OF YOUR SOUL.**

TS: So, that was the message that kicked off a year of change for Waterville First Baptist.

IV) Conclusion (Life Application)

- A) **On New Year's Eve, the church hosted a watchnight service for upwards of 200 people from 8 PM with games, movies, music, all you can eat and a cozy corner for those who needed to rest.**
 - 1) They gathered here in the Sanctuary at 11:45 PM for a short service of rededication and worship.
 - 2) The Planning committee was lead by the Goddard's and Smith's.
 - 3) No, that wasn't Sam, but his parents.
- B) In February, the Church office was so busy, they had to request that people who wished to use the office make an appointment at least one week in advance. **(I wonder how that worked out.)**
- C) A leadership training school was scheduled for five evenings from March 2 through the 30th.
- D) **On March 23rd, the church held a business meeting to begin the planning of a much need renovation program.**
 - 1) **Each home was to be praying on the matter to seek and know God's will, to find unity in the matter and find the courage and faith to fulfill it.**
 - 2) I will share more about this event next week; so, be sure to come back and hear how it all happened.
 - 3) It is an amazing testimony to the faith that built and has sustained this church.
- E) All were encouraged to attend the Billy Graham Rally at the Waterville High School on March 30th at 7:30 PM.
- F) **These are just some of the events that led our church to become as you see it today.**
 - 1) But as Pastor Garrison knew that nothing happens unless we have Jesus living in our Souls and leading the way.
 - 2) My prayer as we celebrate this year that we will find a deeper realization of God in our midst seeking a closer relationship through our prayers, our time of worship and the study of God's Word.

V) Invitation: **Let us Pray!**