



“Living (and Dying) Well”

Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost
Saturday and Sunday,
September 16 and 17, 2017

All Services
The Reverend Dr. Jack M. Horner, Jr.
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Romans 14:1-12; Matthew 18:21-35

Grace and peace be to you from our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

I just want to check something out here. “Siri, what's the meaning of life?” *“Life, a condition that distinguishes animals and plants from inorganic matter including the capacity for growth, reproduction, functional activity and continual change preceding death.”* Okay, not quite what I was looking for. This is now the ninth time that I've asked Siri what the meaning of life is and I've got a different answer every single time. And I bet if I were to ask you what is a life well lived? you probably would come up with lots of different answers as well. Maybe you'd say well if you eat right life would be better for you or perhaps go for a nice walk in the woods, or you know, read a good book, or spend time with family or friends, or maybe it's listening to some nice music or traveling. We all have different things that we think lead to a life that is well lived.

Aristotle said, “Happiness is the meaning and the purpose of live, and the whole aim and end of human existence.”

Epicurus, the Athenian philosopher believed that friendship was the key to a healthy and fulfilling life.

Roman philosopher and Politian Cicero believed that it was in cultivating the intellect that was what was essential to a good life.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, American author and poet says exactly the opposites of Aristotle, he said “that the purpose of live is not to be happy, it's to be useful, to be honorable, to be compassionate, to have it make some difference that you have lived and lived well.

Twentieth century German philosopher Martin Heidegger wrote that a good life was not possible unless you were living authentically.

And Mother Theresa said that “The meaning of life is not to keep yourself in misery, No, but to offer somebody else happiness.”

And how could we not forget philosopher actor Tom Cruise, who at the climatic end of the Sci-Fi movie "Oblivion", about an alien invader machine quoting the most famous lines of the classical poem Horatius about a Roman's life, honor sacrifice, and death said and how can a man die better than facing fearful odds, for the ashes of his fathers, and the temples of his Gods. As Cruise's character says, "and how can a man die better", the alien machine says, "Well you don't have to die", to which Tom Cruise replies, "Everybody dies. The thing is, to die well."

I've been thinking a lot about that recently, about living and dying well.

Maybe it's because the older I get time and things just seem to be speeding up. Of course, I also find myself pursuing the obituaries to see if there is anybody in there that I know.

Now last year of course, I lost my Mother and over my ministry I've seen parishioners and other people who have struggled with illness and even death.

Of course, the church has had its struggles over these last decades, and our own congregation's in discernment about our life together, about our future plans and vision, our mission and our ministry.

Living and dying well.

So how so we do that, how do we live and die well?

In our gospel reading Peter asked Jesus how much forgiving does a person have to be doing? Now in Jesus' culture, if you asked a rabbi how often do you need to forgive a person in the course of one day, the rabbis would say, at least three times a day. Peter wanting to be even more generous than that asks Jesus well is it okay to forgive someone seven times a day? And Jesus always extravagant with grace and mercy and forgiveness says no, 77 times a day.

And some ancient sources say that Jesus actually said 70 times 7, that's 490 times a day. You see for Jesus living well meant living a life of forgiveness, of cleansing the heart of hatred, pride, greed, racism, sexism, and quite frankly any of the other isms you want to come up with.

It's like dialysis, removing the impurities of the blood. You need to kind of get it out of the body. And forgiveness is what removes the sin out of the body, not just your own personal body of faith, but the corporate body of faith, the church. This is a theme that Paul was wondering about too when he wrote to the Romans. He's telling the Romans that their people were majoring in the minors. They were getting upset with the stuff that really doesn't matter in the big picture of life and a life of faith.

The context was the people were wondering whether or not you could eat food that was sacrificed to idols, and how to treat people who either eat or don't eat that food that was sacrificed to idols.

What Paul does, instead of even dealing with the situation, he instead rebukes the Roman Christians for their judgmental attitudes that they have toward each other. For Paul, it was less about the food, whether or not you ate or not, it was about how did you treat your brother or sister. All stand before judgment Paul said, and we will all answer to God for our criticism and despising another brother or sister. Paul says in (2 Cor. 5.10) we will each receive good or evil according to the thing he or she has done in the body." The body he's talking about here is the body of Christ, the church.

We are accountable to God for our actions, both noble or poorly conceived.

The church Paul says should accept the weaker brothers or sisters, not just tolerate them. The language that he is using here is that of intimacy, that of relationship, relationship building. We are to treat others as brothers or sisters. In other words, treat them like they're one of the family. After all we are all in this together, this thing of life and death.

And we do that not because we want to get anything out of it, "not for our own benefit" Paul says. No, we don't live or die in isolation; we are interconnected with each other and with God for that matter. But we live, Paul says, "We live to the Lord, if we die, we die to the Lord." So, whether we live or whether we die we are the Lords.

And how do we live to the Lord? Well loving one another, forgiving one another, serving one another, doing acts of mercy and kindness, living the life of gratitude and generosity, supporting each other in good times and bad times. And how do we die to the Lord? Well that's not in our hands, that's in God's hands, the good hands of God who loves and cares for us. So, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lords, and we are intimately connected to God in holy baptism, and in that sacred meal in Holy Communion which brings us together. We belong to him, we're in a relationship with him, never alone, but connected. Connected to God our creator, to a son who loves us to and through death, and to the Spirit, who gives us faith and holy purpose.

Jesus is Lord of the living and of the dead. And through his cross, through his living and dying well, he promises us eternal life.

But because he lived and died for us, we can live a life that is to the full, and we can die well because we belong to him. Without fear, but in hopeful expectation, without apprehension, but in bold confidence, without anxiety but in holy conviction that Christ is the living Lord of all and is in control of our life.

To live well and to die well, trusting in the one to whom the fullness of time every knee will bow and every tongue will confess. Amen.

In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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