

SLD09.26.10 26th Ordinary
Emory Presbyterian Church
Luke 16:19-31 (the stick)
I Timothy 6:6-14, 17-19 (the carrot)
Jill Oglesby Evans

“The Life That Really *Is* Life - This Summer’s Saints”

The tale of the Rich Man and Lazarus in Luke 16 reminds us of the brevity of life, the choices we have to live it, and the consequences of our actions. This is the gospel’s stick prodding and nudging at us believers – and there’s a certain mercilessness to it. “No, doomed Rich Man,” says Abraham, “I *won’t* send anybody else to warn your loved ones. If they didn’t listen to Moses or the prophets, they’re not going to be convinced even if somebody else rises from the dead.” (“Like, say, *me*,” says Jesus, who’s telling the story. “Any more than *my* followers ever get *me* even when I DO rise from the dead!”)

“Whack!” goes the stick on the heads of Jesus’ listeners..

“Ouch!” cry Jesus’ disciples, then and now.

Then the writer of I Timothy offers us something of a carrot. “You can do it!,” he says. “Come on, disciples, fight the good fight. Lean on God, keep God’s commandments, choose against all that wickedness. And you, rich ones, be good, do good, share generously what you have. See can’t all of you grab a hold of that life that really IS life.”

That life that really IS life? Now which life would that be?

One way to look at our summers’ saints series each year is as an exploration of that question. An exploration of some folks who strike us as one way or another having

grabbed a hold of just that life 1 Timothy's talking about. That life that really IS life. Still not sure what it is?

Well, let's listen for one last word from each of this summer's "saints" and see can't we get the idea.

This year we've heard from our Top Ten Favorites "saints," plus one to grow on. And I like to think that since you voted for this crew, maybe you've already moved past mere acquaintance, maybe already have some clue about what their lives have to say to yours. So listen one more time for that clue, that hint, that glimpse; whatever it is of their truth, their example, that echoes in your own hearts, before they step modestly out of the sermonic spotlight. Listen now for each one's parting word to you.

First we'll hear from **Bill W.**, successful New York Stockbroker, outstanding golfer, raging drunk, and founder of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Tony – "You heard my story about the grace God wrenched out of my pickled despair. Maybe you never hit bottom like I did. Maybe you have. All I know is what life showed me – that I am absolutely powerless over my addictions.

But that's hardly the end of my story. What else I discovered is that there's a Power higher than mine. But no sense flapping my lips about that. Like Dr. Bob said to me just before he died: "Don't mess this up, Bill. Keep it simple."

So I'm just talking about me. If you have any idea what I'm talking about, google an AA meeting close to you. And go to it. Otherwise, well, God be with you."

Julian of Norwich, 14th century English anchoress in a war-torn, disease-infested world, heard this from God on her deathbed:

Heather – The good Lord answered all the questions and doubts which I could raise, saying most comfortingly: “I may make all things well, and I can make all things well, and I shall make all things well, and I will make all things well; and you will see yourself that every kind of thing will be well....” And in these words, God wishes us to be enclosed in rest and in peace.

God did not say, “you will not be troubled, you will not be belaboured, you will not be disquieted.” But God did say, “you will not be overcome.”

I saw God, and sought God; I had God, and lacked God. This is, and should be, our ordinary undertaking in this life. Get used to it.

And may God be with you.

And from that flaming Spanish “wild woman of Avila,” **St. Teresa:**

Deedra – “What else *is* Mysticism, really, but a loving, experiential awareness of God? An awareness in your heart, in your mind, through your senses, of the loving presence of God? Tell me that’s not available to everyone in the friendly discourse of prayer. Listen up, you Presbyterians! The mind must sink into the heart, and the heart must catch on fire! And so should the belly! Is that so hard to understand?

Here’s the thing: you belong to God. It was for God you were born. Therefore ask this of God, “What do you want of me?” And again, “What do you want of me?” And again, “What do you want of me?” And keep asking.

Vaya con Dios.

And from world-renowned and beloved global icon of goodness, Mother Teresa,

Libba – I know I’m cute and little and holy and all that. That is, I’ve done a lot of fine, God-centered things in my life, and people tend to admire and emulate me. And that’s a good thing. Only, now that you’ve heard the truth about my personal spiritual life, don’t discount the harshness of it. Except at the very beginning, there was never anything cute or little or holy about it. In fact, I spent virtually the whole of my adult life in a crisis of faith. I tell you so that the veil might drop from your eyes, about me, about God – about your own spiritual journey.

True discipleship demands everything from you, even consolation. There is no human remedy for this. Just know that feeling God’s presence is not the only proof of God’s presence. In fact, the experience of the absence of God is a purposeful dimension of anyone’s spiritual journey.

God’s blessings on you.

12th century German abbess, healer, musician and mystic, **Hildegard of Bingen:**
Pauline – You...(pointing to people around)...each of you...is a “living spark,” a unique, precious and dynamic expression of God’s delight, a “ray of divine splendor,” proceeding from God the same way the rays of the sun proceed from the sun itself! Do you know what that means? It means we’re all walking around shining like the sun! Not everybody can see that, but *I* can see it. And this, too: that God loves each one of us exceedingly, and gives us the best of treasures, a *vivid intelligence*. So think every hour how to make so great a gift as useful to others as to ourselves, so people will be inspired by our good example to praise and honor God! (Say “goodbye” or “God bless you” in German)

St. AuGUSTine, 4th century African man considered by many to be the most important Christian theologian since the Apostle Paul:

Johnson: “You know, I’m a really bright guy. Been a student most of my life, of philosophy, of rhetoric, of theology... but also of life itself. I’ve seen it all. Heck, I’ve *done* it all. There are no sweet pleasures of life I haven’t tasted... many times.

You may think, as I did, that you’re hungry for knowledge. Or love. Or sex. Or money. You may think the only thing that will satisfy you is getting your way, or your due, or your fair share. I know. I thought like that a long time. But here’s what my life taught me: Our hearts are restless until they rest in God. That’s it. Think about it. (Say “goodbye” or “God bless you” in Kikuyu or Swahili)”

Oddball English lay mystic of the 1940’s and ‘50’s, Caryll Houselander:

Carol: “All right, you may think I’m odd, and maybe I am. But life has taught *me* a few things, too. It’s not like God only speaks to the ancients. (point to Johnson) Or to the guys. Or to the churchly. In fact, I’m here to tell you that through Jesus Christ, God speaks to anyone, or through anyone, wherever and whatever He damn well pleases.

Don’t look at me like that! I’ll swear in church if I want to; you’re lucky I even showed up!

Anyway, let me tell you what God told me: that Christ is in everybody. *Everybody*. You look for Christ only in the saints and you’re gonna miss him.

Not that he’s always that recognizable. Like that guy who dragged me out of church because I wouldn’t give up his pew – he might be the exception.

Or maybe not, 'cause God's real clear that Christ's in everybody. Sometimes he's wounded, or even dead and buried, but Christ in the tomb is still potentially a risen Christ, so we hadn't better be too quick to judge. That's all I've got to say."

Let's hear know from activist and speechifyer **Sojourner Truth**, born into slavery in 1797 in the state of New York, who traveled the nation to speak out against slavery and for women's rights. *(move slowly, solemnly, to the mike)*

Elise: Well, children, where there is so much racket there must be something out of kilter. I think that 'twixt the Negroes of the South and the women at the North, all talking about rights, the white men will be in a fix pretty soon.

But you've heard all that before. What I really want to leave you with this morning is a song. There hadn't been enough singin' goin' on this morning.

(Elise, sing as much of this as you like)

*Let us sing a song that will cheer us by the way,
In a little while we're going home;
For the night will end in the everlasting day,
In a little while we're going home.*

Refrain

*In a little while, In a little while,
We shall cross the billow's foam;
We shall meet at last, When the stormy winds are past,
In a little while we're going home.*

*We will do the work that our hands may find to do,
In a little while we're going home;
And the grace of God will our daily strength renew,
In a little while we're going home.*

*We will smooth the path for some weary, way-worn feet,
In a little while we're going home;
And may loving hearts spread around an influence sweet!*

In a little while we're going home.

Refrain

*In a little while, In a little while,
We shall cross the billow's foam;
We shall meet at last, When the stormy winds are past,
In a little while we're going home*

Y'all be followers of Lord Jesus, hear? God bless you.

About the same time as Sojourner Truth lived a young girl in Lisieux, France whose disciplined consciousness became a model for those who wished to stay alert, focused and open to the presence of God. Her name was Terese, and she was a Carmelite nun.

Anne: People make things so complicated. Life in God is not complicated; it just requires our attention. Our constant attention. Paying attention to God in the midst of the everyday activities of life is all it takes to transform a situation, *any* situation, into a holy moment. Every single moment of my life that I can accept and live in a spirit of love is an opportunity to exercise faith and deepen my relationship with God.

This is not a big heavy deal. That's why I call it "the Little Way." The Little Way of simply paying more attention to God every day. Every hour. Every minute. ...Try it!

Adieu

And now, one of the great modern icons of peace and nonviolent resistance,

Mahatma Gandhi:

Jonathan: Be the change you want to see in the world. That's what I'd like you to remember. If you think things should be different, change yourself. That's the

best place to start. The most powerful place to start. Perhaps, really, the *only* place to start changing the world - yourself. You wish the world were a better place? Start with your own transformation.

I've had a productive life; you've heard about a lot of it. Only don't live my life; live your own. And don't go trying civil disobedience until you've studied it first. "*Civil*" is the operative word. Also, I don't think you should eat meat, but then, that's another conversation. Just remember this: you want to see things different in the world? ...Start with yourself.

Namaste. (when you say this, put your hands together as in prayer, and bow.)

And finally, let us close with the disarming presence of one who loved God with an open heart, a *foolishly* open heart. Our last word this morning comes from **St.**

Francis of Assisi, whose only quest in life was joy, poverty and service.

Stewart: "Tis a gift to be simple." You've heard that song? Well, I guess that pretty well sums it up. I'm with little Terese on that one. And with Gandhi, too, about starting with one's self when trying to change the world. That was all I was ever able to accomplish, really – to try to recreate the life of Jesus in myself the best I could.

Everybody thought I was silly. I was! Jesus might have thought I was silly, too, though with him, it would have been a shared joke. I guess love, itself, is kind of silly. And Love that tolerates and embraces and forgives everything...? Well, that's the most foolish of all. Well, if you're not familiar with it, just take a gander at that cross up there. No way to make any sense of it at all. So don't try. Just receive it. Because that kind of love? It's simply God's gift to you.

The peace of Christ be with you.

Ten testimonies to the life that really IS life, plus one to grow on.

Unlike Abraham, I guess Jesus *does* keep sending folks to remind those he loves about the brevity of life and the choices available for living it. Gospel stick or gospel carrot – both point in the same direction, prodding, nudging, inviting and summoning us to lean on God, to keep God’s commandments, and to fight the good fight, to see can’t we grab hold of that life that really IS life.

In one way or another, each of these characters did it, grabbed hold of that life that really IS life. And so far as I can see, there’s not any reason, no, not the least, why we shouldn’t grab hold, too.

To the glory of God. Amen.

