

Sermon 062517 Life
Scripture Job 38: 1-11, Mark 4: 35-41
Sermon Title- Remember To Live

Eclectic is a word that someone asked me the definition of recently. Eclectic means varied. I have eclectic tastes. That is true of food. There is nothing I won't try and I often find something to like about it. I have eclectic tastes when it comes to books. That is also true of music. I think opera is the only type of music I don't like, but then again, I haven't given it much of a chance.

A type of music that I love is American folk music. Among my favorite folk artists is John Prine. I got into John Prine when I was in college during the first Coolidge administration.

It is hard to say which John Prine song is my favorite, but if pressed I might say, "Angle From Montgomery." There is a poignant line in it that says, "How can a person go to work in the morning, come home in the evening, and have nothing to say?" So often we drift through life, sleepwalking through our days without thinking about what it all means. In our stupor, we lose sight of how glorious this life really is. We pray for long life, but what are we doing to truly live life?

When you have experiences, do you reflect on the meaning of the experiences? Do you think about what you might learn from experiences, how you might grow, how you might have acted in an experience might reveal something about your character or moral and ethical standing or do you just go through life without thinking about it?

In my work as a pastor, I have people come to me for counsel. It is part of the pastor's role. Mostly, people come to me looking for comfort when something happens in their life that is difficult. A parent gets sick or a child gets into drugs and it might be a good time to see the pastor. The type of counsel that I don't have much of an opportunity to do, and this experience is similar to my clergy colleagues, is people facing a moral dilemma or people needing to talk about something they did that they regret.

Why do people avoid going to the pastor for moral and ethical struggles even though the pastor is trained to counsel on those issues? Well, people want to be well thought of by the pastor, so they might avoid morally sticky topics. But maybe more significantly, people are quick to justify their behavior, even their less than honorable behavior. People don't struggle with their own morality maybe because they are not paying attention to the meaning of their lives. People often ignore their own shortcomings and focus on other people's shortcomings.

There was a lovely little book named *Tuesdays With Morrie* published in 1997 written by a Brandeis University graduate, Mitch Albom, who went to visit his favorite professor Morrie, who was dying. Morrie had much wisdom to impart and Mitch captured it beautifully in his book. One of the observations that Morrie made was that many people walk around with a meaningless life. They seem half asleep, even when they are busy doing things that they think are important.

We tend to miss the miracles that life gives us every day. We get on an airplane and instead of marveling at the fact that we can fly safely at 600 miles an hour, we complain about the food, the crowding, the delays. We come home to our families and instead of rejoicing at the fact that we have families to come home to, to share our lives with, to love, we shrug and find fault. We take our families for granted. We tend to miss the joys of life, the passion, the wonder. We tend to miss life's meaning and purpose.

In this morning's Hebrew Bible lesson, we heard the marvelous scene where God speaks to Job from the whirlwind. God bellows to Job, "Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me. Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation?" and on. Maybe we need the Job experience of being rattled, being humbled by God's glory, to be woken from our sleepwalk through life.

Another difficulty of our sleepwalk through life is that we remain ill prepared for the storms of life. Our gospel lesson today is the famous story of the storm on the Sea of Galilee. Jesus was asleep in the boat when the storm rose. Some disciples were panicked by the storm. They woke Jesus up and yelled to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" Jesus calmed the storm and everyone settled down.

We have those moments when we are plodding through our daily routines and we receive a phone call that there has been an accident, or a bad biopsy report. We are jolted out of our fulfillment of obligations

and we are struck with how fragile life is. Then, like the disciples in the storm, we question God. We might say, “Why is God letting this happen to me?” Instead of preparing ourselves in the good times by developing our relationship with God so to know to turn to God when the storm hits, we sleepwalk into the storm ill prepared.

Death is often the storm that strikes us the hardest, that challenges who we are and what we have become. We realize around death that it is only because life is so precious that death is so tragic. The message that cries out to us from the empty seats at the holiday table is that life is too short to be petty, life is too precious to be squandered, life is too fragile to be handled thoughtlessly.

Death can teach us much about life. Through death we learn that life is uncertain so cherish every day you have. Take no day for granted. Don't put off the good deed, the kind word, the phone call of reconciliation. There is no guarantee that what you don't do today will be there for you to do tomorrow.

Love can also rattle us out of life's sleepwalk. Love can well up in us to make us feel more intensely alive than we can imagine. In the famous scene from the classic movie, *Singing In The Rain*, Gene Kelly is singing and dancing with joy not because he loves the rain, but because he is in love. In love, we can celebrate life.

It is time to end the sleepwalking and learn how to celebrate. Many people know how to have fun but do not know how to elevate it to

the experience of joy. Joy is the kind of feeling that makes life worthwhile and leaves us feeling empty and cheated when we can't achieve it.

Likewise, we might know sadness but cannot learn to grieve. Kahlil Gibran in *The Prophet* wrote, "There is nothing more whole than a broken heart." And "The deeper a groove sorrow carves in you, the more joy you can contain." I remind myself regularly when writing sermons that there is a broken heart in every pew.

It is through the pain of a broken heart that we can learn how to feel. A heart that refuses to break has become so calloused that it is immune to all feeling. Let your heart break and you will awake from the sleepwalk.

Finally, let yourself stand in Job's sandals. Be humbled by the glory of God as God bellowed from the whirlwind. When we learn to look at the world and see God's fingerprints all over it, then we have learned to look within ourselves and sense the Spirit of God moving us to be good, to be generous, and to be compassionate. We learn to relish the daylight with gratitude and to welcome the darkness unafraid. Then we can revel and wonder at the beauty of the blue sky and be ready not if, but when, the storm arrives. Then we know we are truly alive.

My prayer for you this day is this; in the immortal words of Jonathan Swift, "May you live every day of your life." AMEN