

“The Meaning of Life”

Date: May 26,, 2019

Place: Lakewood UMC

Occasion: Memorial Day Weekend Theme: Meaning; Relationship to God

Texts: 1 Corinthians 10:31; John 17:1-5

Some of you may remember the movie “City Slickers,” in which Billy Crystal plays the part of a bored baby boomer who sells radio advertisements. One day he visits his son’s school to tell about his work, along with other fathers. Partway into his talk he lets loose a deadpan monologue to the bewildered youngsters in the class:

“Value this time in your life, kids, because this is the time in your life when you still have your choices. It goes by fast. When you’re a teenager, you think you can do anything and you do. Your twenties are a blur.”

Thirties you raise your family, you make a little money, and you think to yourself, “What happened to my twenties?” Forties, you grow a little pot belly, you grow another chin. The music starts to get too loud; one of your girlfriends from high school becomes a grandmother.”

Fifties, you have a minor surgery; you’ll call it a procedure, but it’s a surgery. Sixties, you’ll have a major surgery, the music is still too loud, but it doesn’t matter because you can’t hear it anyway.”

Seventies, you and the wife retire to Fort Lauderdale. You start eating dinner at 2:00 in the afternoon, you have lunch around ten, breakfast the night before, spend most of your time wandering around malls looking for the ultimate soft yogurt and muttering, “How come the kids don’t call?”

The eighties, you’ll have a major stroke, and you end up babbling with some Jamaican nurse who your wife can’t stand, but who you call Mama. Any questions?”

What’s the point? Exactly! That’s what he’s asking: What’s the point?

Does life have any meaning, or is it all absurd and meaningless? One person responded to this week's email when I told you what the sermon title was. He said, "The meaning of life is going to work, pay the bills and taxes and then die." How many others feel that way? A lot of people do today.

What is the meaning of life? It comes as no surprise that Jesus dealt with that question. Surprisingly the answer is not given in the context of an argument with Jewish leaders, or in a discussion with his disciples, nor is it given in the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus deals with so many fundamental issues.

Instead, Jesus deals with the meaning of life in the context of prayer. He is in the middle of what some have called his High Prayer. It takes place in the Upper Room, just before his crucifixion. Listen again to his prayer in John 17. I am lifting out a few of the key phrases:

"While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe, but I will remain in the world no longer...Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one. Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. For you granted Him authority over all people that he might give eternal life.... and this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent."

There it is in the last sentence I read. Jesus delivers the meaning of life. What is it? "This is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." In essence, Jesus tells us that the meaning of life is to have a relationship with God and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

Listen, life is not a crap shoot. Life is *not* meaningless. It is a gift, a gift from God to each one of us. It is precious. *You* are precious. You are a child of God and you were made for a purpose. Jesus tells us as much in today's lesson. We are made to be in relationship with God and with Jesus.

That statement tells us who we are. It tells us we matter, that each one of us is important and of eternal value. My friends, it helps to see a therapist to boost your self-confidence. But our true self-esteem comes when we realize we are a child of God, claimed by the Savior, Jesus Christ.

Your meaning and value are not based on what you do, or don't do. Your meaning comes as part of your inherent worth – created and redeemed by God. You matter. You are loved beyond measure by the God of the universe who made everything.

Love is what gives your life meaning. You are loved by God. And there is nothing you can do that will make God stop loving you. A spiritual awakening occurs when we realize God loves us. So much so that God sent God's only Son to show us. In Jesus Christ we see what God's love looks like. It is giving, self-giving, even to the point of self-sacrifice. That's what God's love looks like.

Tomorrow is Memorial Day and we honor the men and women who have died in the service of our country. We see something admirable in a life that has been sacrificed for a cause greater than itself. We recognize that this is admirable because it's what God has done for us. God shows us His love for us in the life, death and resurrection of His only begotten Son.

My friends, you and I can choose to live for something bigger than ourselves, or we can simply live to get by. It's easy to get caught up in the daily grind of work, paying bills, housekeeping and shopping. While these are all important aspects of living, we can fall into a trap of busyness.

But in our hearts I think we all yearn to live for something that makes us feel alive, that gives us a purpose. I have found that purpose in choosing to follow Jesus, who has shown me that I have eternal value in God's eyes. My value is found in my relationship with God, not in the things I do. But my reason for being is to respond to this gracious outpouring of love that has been shown to me. I choose to live not for just myself.

My focus is not on myself, but on God. What will please the One who loves me so much? What will bring glory to my Creator? Do you see it? The verse we read from 1 Corinthians says it so well: "So, whether you eat or drink or whatever you, do it all for the glory of God."

Soldiers live and die for a cause they believe in – their country. And we are grateful for their service and sacrifice. They show us that living for something that we strongly believe in will take courage. It takes courage and strength, as well, to live for God, especially if we want to live a life that honors God.

Barbara Brown Taylor is an Episcopal priest and author. She writes: "If Jesus were in charge of an average congregation, I figure there would be about four people left there on a Sunday morning, and chances are those four would be fooling themselves."

Jesus would greet newcomers by saying, "Are you absolutely sure you want to follow this way of life? It will take everything you have. It has to come before everything else that matters to you. Plenty of people have launched out on it without counting the cost, and as you can see they are not here anymore."

The other thing is, if you succeed, if you really follow me, it will probably get you killed. Why don't you go home and think it over? I would hate for you to get in over your head."

Most of us will never serve in the military or go to war, but we can each discover a cause that gives our life meaning and purpose. As Christians *that* cause, bigger than ourselves, is none other than a relationship with God the Father, Jesus the Christ, and the Holy Spirit.

What is the meaning of life? To realize you are loved by God, and then to do all that you can to bring glory to God. As you have been loved, so love others. Love not just the people you like, but learn to love all of God's people, and then you will bring glory to the Father. Amen? Amen.