

That's Life

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Richmond Heights, Ohio

The Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
The Rite of Christian Initiation
Holy Communion
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Ecclesiastes 1:1-11; 3:9-13; Colossians 3:1-4; Luke 12:13-21

“Moreover, it is God’s gift that all should eat and drink and take pleasure in all their toil.”
-- Ecclesiastes 3:13

As most of you know, we've had a new series on the stewardship of creation this summer here at Faith – well, actually, it's been in the Euclid Creek Reservation – and I've been having a great time with it. You'll need to speak to some of the folks who've attended – Betty St. John or Lou Hein or Phyllis Huston or Ron Ober or several other folks I can direct you to after the service – to find out whether the series has done them any good, but I've been having a blast. We've been gathering for study, for prayer, for fellowship, for lunch, and for a walk, but mainly we've been gathering to remind ourselves of how wonderful and how fragile God's precious creation is, and how important it is for all of us to treat it with the respect it deserves.

It's been an unqualified joy for me to be able to show people just a little bit of what the Bible and others have said about creation, including us and our place and role in that creation. It's a vast topic that touches on our lives in so many different ways, and I can easily imagine spending years and years exploring the ramifications of the faithful stewardship of creation.

I was first introduced to the serious study of nature and the Bible more than fifteen years ago by a professor of scripture at Harvard, Ted Hiebert, who now teaches at McCormick Seminary in Chicago, and nothing brings me more delight than sharing with others what I've had the privilege to study and learn in places like Harvard and Yale. For someone like me, who never imagined himself at places like that, there's always been a deep sense of obligation to take what I got in those places and share it with folks who didn't have the privilege I had, and that's what I've been doing in these past several years as your pastor. At least, that's what I've been trying to do.

And I've been having a great time doing it. I know I should probably be telling you how hard I work, and how busy my schedule is, and how desperately I'm trying to keep up – “I'm dancing as fast as I can” and all of that – but the truth of the matter is really much simpler than that.

The truth is that I'm having a blast. I love what I do. I love to preach, I love to teach, I love to lead worship, I love to talk with people, I love to think about the possibilities this church holds, and above all else, I love to think about what it means to serve God faithfully in my generation and to help all of you do the same. You pay me – quite decently – to do that, and I can't really imagine a better job to have.

Yes, of course, it has its moments; every job has. And it is work, after all, and in a couple of weeks I'll be going on vacation and I'll remember the difference between work and not-work.

But when I step back and look at the big picture, I find myself completely at peace with the decisions I've made about what to do with my life. I find utter joy in knowing

that I have been called by God to help others hear that call in their own lives and to live out that call in everything they do. In other words, I'm having a blast.

The text for this morning's sermon is from the book of Ecclesiastes, the third verse of chapter thirteen: "Moreover, it is God's gift that all should eat and drink and take pleasure in all their toil."

In other words, God wants you to have a blast with what you're doing. God wants you to enjoy yourself. God wants you to enjoy your life's work. God wants you to find work that's worth doing and to enjoy doing it. God doesn't want you to be miserable. God doesn't want you to be unhappy. God doesn't want you to be cranky. God doesn't need your misery, your unhappiness, or your crankiness. God doesn't need it, God doesn't want it, and nobody else does, either.

When people asked you as a child, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" how many of you answered, "Bitter"? How many of you answered, "Dissatisfied"? How many of you answered, "Unfulfilled"?

But if people asked you today how happy you are with the choices you've made with that third of your life you give to gainful employment, how many of you can honestly say you're having a blast? How many of you can say that you've received gratefully God's gift of enough to eat and drink and pleasure in your toil?

Now I know that it's fashionable to complain in our society. People in affluent societies tend to do that. We tend to whine. We tend to throw ourselves pity parties at every opportunity. We like to think of ourselves as burdened and heavy laden with the responsibilities of being the world's only remaining superpower.

Can we get over that, please? Can we get over ourselves as an overfed, overhoused, overpaid, overclothed, overworked, overanxious, underappreciated collection of malcontents and prima donnas?

God has never asked us to run the world. God has never asked us to police the world. God has never asked us to spread democracy, combat terrorism, or build and run a global economy. God has never asked us to do any of that.

God has asked us, simply, to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God. That's it. That's our job. That's our toil. That's our life's work. That's the real calling we're all called to, whether we're plumbers or teachers, politicians or engineers. Whatever our hands find to do, do we do justice while we're doing it? Are we loving kindness while we're loving what we do? Is our walk through the daily routine a walk with God, knowing our place in God's created order, which is what true humility is?

If the answer to questions like those, my friends, is yes – truly yes for you – I can promise you satisfaction. I can promise you joy. I can promise you a peace that the world neither gives nor takes away.

And I can promise you something more. I can promise you that when you come to the end of this earthly journey – and we all will, sooner or later – if you have lived your life doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with God – or in John Milton's words, "in my great Taskmaster's eye" -- this is what you will hear: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant. . . Enter into the joy of your Lord."

The life that God has promised us, my dear friends, if we will only accept the invitation to it, is not a life of grim responsibility, a life of anxiety about the fate of ourselves or others, or a life of self-pity or discontent. The life that is waiting for you, as God's gracious gift, in this world and in any world to come, is joy. That's life. That's life as God intends it for you and for all. Thanks be to God.