

Be the church: enjoy this life

Ecclesiastes 9:7-10

May 17, 2015

Be the church ...

Protect the environment

Because it is God's handiwork and because it is precious to God.

Care for the poor

Because they are God's handiwork and because they are precious, especially precious to God.

Forgive often

Because God has forgiven you.

Reject racism

Because the very heart of the good news is that walls are torn down and that people -- all people, all races -- are reconciled to each other.

Fight for the powerless

Because we have a common enemy, the pride and greed and fear that drive us apart and rob all of us of the richness of life God intends for us.

Share earthly and spiritual resources

God blesses us so that we may be a blessing.

Embrace diversity

Because only together, in all our extravagant variation, do we fully reflect the glory of God.

Love God

You do understand, don't you, that loving God is not an obligation, but an extraordinary privilege?

Enjoy this life

Really? That's on the list?

Yes, really! Enjoying this life is an important part of what it means to be the church.

Enjoy life with the one you love, as long as you live the useless life that God has given you in this world ...

Enjoy every useless day of it ...

Huh? Maybe I need to explain.

Ecclesiastes is one of four books in our Bible classified as wisdom books. The others are Job, Proverbs, and the Song of Songs. These four books are very different from each other in style and subject matter, but all of them, in their own ways, explore this theme of wisdom. Wisdom is not mere intelligence, but more like savoir faire -- knowing how to live well, how to live graciously, how to live wisely, how to live fully. Its opposite is foolishness: acting rashly, choosing poorly, squandering your life, making life difficult for yourself and everybody around you.

Proverbs is the classic wisdom book, full of short pithy sayings -- proverbs.

*A fool will believe anything;
smart people watch their step.
Sensible people are careful to stay out of trouble,
but stupid people are careless and act too quickly.
People with a hot temper do foolish things;
wiser people remain calm.*

But wisdom is more, much more, than mere common sense. Wisdom begins, both Proverbs and Job say, with reverence for the Lord, fear of the Lord. When you acknowledge God first, when you understand that everything, including yourself, owes its very being to God, then everything else begins to make sense. You know God's way is the wise way.

But if that's true, then human notions of wisdom and the good life can sometimes get in the way. The books of Job and Ecclesiastes are fearless thought experiments that root out all the chaff that poses as wisdom.

Job challenges the notion that we are in control of our own destiny, that if we live right, we will live well. What happens if it doesn't work? What happens if you live right, but lose everything? If everything, everything that is precious to you, is taken away from you, what do you have left?

What do you have left? If you have nothing but God, you have everything.

Ecclesiastes examines all the charms and fancies, all the pleasures and "perks," all the fine and wonderful things we so eagerly seek in this life -- money and fame and sex and even wisdom itself -- and concludes that it is all useless. "Vanity! Vanity! All is vanity!" All of it is just chasing the wind. It is all useless because rich and poor, wise and foolish, die alike when their time comes, because there are no guarantees, because ...

the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to the skillful; but time and chance happen to them all.

All we have, all we can count on, is God and the life God has given us, this life. So enjoy it! Enjoy this life!

It is important for us, too, followers of the risen Jesus, to heed this advice from an old Jewish sage, because Christians sometimes twist the meaning of the salvation Jesus has won for us, focussing on achievement and reward, believing that a good life, a faithful life, will yield an eternal reward. But it's not about achievement. It's not about reward. It's all grace. It's all gift.

Life is a gift. And new life, new life in and with Christ, which has been given to you by faith and sealed in baptism, is a gift. This life is what we have. It is God's gift, God's wonderfully exuberant no-strings-attached gift. So enjoy it! Enjoy every useless day of it!

Just a thought. If you really believed that in the grand scheme of things anything you might do in this day is useless, wouldn't that free you to enjoy it?

Be the church! Enjoy this life!

Listen to Sarah and Adam and J'Kalein and Samantha sing. Give a hug to the person sitting next to you in the pew. Take a dog for a walk in the woods.

Go out to eat. Share a potluck meal with your friends. Go on a hayride or carve a pumpkin or try to bite a swinging apple or twirl a hula hoop. Laugh.

Fish a northeast Iowa stream. Ride your bike. Kiss your wife. Make a new friend. Visit an old friend.

Walk the beach on the Isle of Iona. Taste an oyster. Watch the sunrise. Stand in the rain. Give your grandchild a piggyback ride. Sing.

Learn a new hobby. Give an unexpected gift. Climb a mountain. Paddle a canoe. Hold hands. Read a book. See a play. Worship God. Be.

Be the church! Enjoy this life! And thank God every day, every moment, for this extraordinary gift.