



57A PENTECOST 16A LITURGY

The meaning of life

Abstract

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. 22 If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know!

Philippians 1:21–22

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57A Pentecost 16A Liturgy

The meaning of life

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PROPER 20

YEAR A

Old Testament & Psalm, Option I

Old Testament Exodus 16:2–15

Psalm Psalm 105:1–6, 37–45

or

Old Testament & Psalm, Option II

Old Testament Jonah 3:10–4:11

Psalm Psalm 145:1–8

New Testament Philippians 1:21–30

Gospel Matthew 20:1–16ⁱ

Paul explains his personal struggles to the Philippians. He says that their struggles are like his. He wants to appear encouraging and commends them for their approach to life in the faith.

This week's resources explore: knowing and choosing your path, and sticking to it when it is difficult.

	<p>Pre-Service The Heart Of Worship</p>
	<p>Introit</p>
	<p>Greeting</p> <p>May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ The Love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all</p>
	<p>We Gather</p> <p>The Lord our God is great and to be highly praised. The Lord our God is great beyond our understanding. The Lord our God is loving and full of mercy. We come to worship.</p> <p><i>Let us pray</i> Lord God,</p>

	<p>we all belong to your kingdom and we bring our different lives and experiences to worship you today, the true and living God. Amen.</p>
	<p>Hymn/song 2 - Hearts on fire - Michael Mangan</p>
	<p>Welcome</p> <p><i>Let us pray</i> Lord God of all that has been, all that is and all that will be, we have all been born and one day we all will die, but today is a day when all of us are here, here to worship and praise you. Accept, O God, all that we bring and all that we offer, in the name of Christ. Amen.</p>
	<p>Readings</p> <p><i>Philippians 1:21–30</i></p> <p>²¹ For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. ²² If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! ²³ I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; ²⁴ but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. ²⁵ Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, ²⁶ so that through my being with you again your boasting in Christ Jesus will abound on account of me.</p> <p>²⁷ Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel ²⁸ without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God. ²⁹ For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him, ³⁰ since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have. ⁱⁱ</p> <p><i>respond</i> For the word of the Lord Thanks be to God</p>
	<p>Hymn/song/video 3 - Chris Tomlin - We Fall Down</p>
	<p>We say Sorry Almighty God, we don't always know how we got to where we are, and we certainly don't always know where we are going; we don't always choose the right path,</p>

and we certainly don't always follow it;
 we don't always deal well with the struggles of life,
 and we don't always give thanks for the joys of life either;
 we don't always think of the effects that our choices
 cause to others, near and far.
 We are too often selfish,
 wanting what we want no matter what the cost to others.
 Almighty God, forgive us, reassure us
 and cradle us within your forgiveness.
 Amen.

Words of Assurance

Hymn/Song

4 - Be bold be strong – Matt Redman

Response

The meaning of life

Philippians 1:12-30

Last week I told you about the Monty Python movie, "The Life of Brian"
 Please believe me,
 It is purely accidental that today's address has the same name as another of his movies.

Let's start with a story.

One day an advertising executive decided to emulate a middle Eastern Swami.
 Suggesting he was able to answer life's most profound questions
 he had soon gathered a group of disciples
 who reverently sat around him as he meditated.

As he sat there one day

he suddenly uttered his profound insight for the day.

"Life is like a can of Pringle Potato chips
 floating in a bowl of cola."

At this the disciples nodded with reverent understanding, except one young fellow
 who uttered incredulously how did you come to that conclusion.

With that the swami fixed his dissenter with an icy stare and said
 "look, did you come to learn or argue!"

So, what is the meaning of life?

Someone graffitied a subway wall with the line

"Life is just one contradiction after another"

Very soon, another artist added the line

"No it's not."

Let's face it, for some people life has really no point, no ultimate meaning or maybe even no value.

The playwright Checkhov once said, "Asking what life is, is like asking what a carrot is.
 A carrot is a carrot."

And to many in our society today, they might agree.

There is no real point to life.

We are all just accidents in an evolutionary cycle. Life is an accident with no meaning.

Research suggests that people today are reluctant to hold any opinions.

We think people who thought that they were right in the past
did terrible things as a result.

So, maybe it is best to have no opinions at all.ⁱⁱⁱ

There is a form of moral vacuum,
where nothing is really right and nothing is really wrong.
They see no ultimate purpose in life.

But if there is no purpose to life, then there is also no power.
It must be exceedingly difficult for human beings to live without purpose.

Consider first peoples who died very suddenly and often inexplicably
when their cultures were eradicated by incoming conquerors.^{iv}

But where there IS meaning, though,
where there is faith,
where there is purpose,
miracles take place.

Scientists and religion have spent many centuries seeing each other with gross suspicion.
but there are several studies that suggest a beneficial effect of faith and belief.

But in a 1995 report on 232 people who underwent elective open-heart surgery,
found that those who received no strength or comfort from religion
were more likely to die within six months of the operation.

A decade-long study of 2,700 people
showed that after accounting for all risk factors,
only increased church attendance, lowered mortality rates.
(I'm glad you decided to watch this morning.
You never know, you may just live longer because of it:-)

A review of one group of 200 studies suggests
that religion has positive effects on diseases ranging from cervical cancer to stroke.
In short, the evidence indicates that faith is good for us.
Where there is purpose, there is power!

But, let me add this one thought:
IT MAY BE THAT MANY PEOPLE DON'T REALLY WANT AN ULTIMATE MEANING TO LIFE.
See, there is a danger here.

If we declare in our hearts that the Gospel is true,
that there is a meaning to life,
that there is a God who exists,
a God who has created us in His own image
and has placed us in responsible stewardship of this earth,
if we decide in our heart that this proposition is true,
we just might have to change the way we are living.

"Never before has the world been so desperately asking for answers to crucial questions,
and never before has the world been so frantically committed
to the idea that no answers are or should be possible.

To paraphrase the Bible, the modern attitude is,
 Father, forgive us, for we know not what we're doing " AND PLEASE DON'T TELL US!"^v
 My guess is that some don't really want to believe the Gospel.
 There might be too much to give up.
 For many people there is no meaning to life,
 but wise people know that where there is no purpose, there is no power.

So there is one final thing that needs to be said:
 CHRIST OFFERS MORE MEANING THAN OUR LIVES CAN EVER CONTAIN.
 In a world where people are having difficulty finding meaning,
 Christ offers not only meaning but a path to a victorious life.
 If only getting by is what life is all about,
 then almost any philosophy will do.
 But if we want something more,
 something the world cannot give,
 then we must turn to Christ.

This is what our lesson from Philippians is about.
 Paul is in prison. He is awaiting trial. A conviction could mean his death.
 He wants his friends to know that he is prepared either way.
 So he writes,

"For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain.
 But if I am to live on in the flesh,
 this will mean fruitful labour for me;
 and I do not know which to choose.
 But I am hard-pressed from both directions,
 having the desire to depart and be with Christ,
 for that is very much better;
 yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake."

Do you get what he is saying?
 In Paul's mind, it was a win/win situation,
 whether he lived or died.
 Because Christ promised him a full, rich, purposeful life either way
 whether he was serving God in this world or in the world which is to come.

There are people who see no meaning in life.
 How sad.
 Where there is no purpose, there is no power.

Christ offers us more meaning than our lives can contain;
 he offers us life pressed down and running over.
 "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain," wrote Paul.
 "But if I am to live on in the flesh,
 this will mean fruitful labour for me;
 and I do not know which to choose.
 But I am hard-pressed from both directions,
 having the desire to depart and be with Christ,
 for that is very much better;
 yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake."

	<p>For Paul the issue was win/win all the way. Life did not frighten him. Neither did death. He had found the source of all power. He had found a reason to live. Amen</p>
	<p>Hymn/song 5 -I know that my redeemer lives</p>
	<p>Offering</p>
	<p>Notices</p>
	<p>Prayers for all people</p> <p><i>Display (on screen or table) a large scale local map. Invite people, using a finger, to trace the route by which they came to church today. Suggest that we all got here today, but by different means and different routes; so it is with the way we come to know and experience God. Rejoice in that and be thankful for it.</i></p> <p><i>Response after each bidding: God, be with them.</i></p> <p>In trial and tribulation, God of comfort, be near me. In loss and devastation, God of grief, grieve with me. In uncertainty and confusion, God of the way, show me a path. In want and in need, God of provision, provide for me. In times of sluggishness and laziness, God of patience, wait for me. In comfort and in joy, God of love, let me not forget you. Amen.</p> <p>Eternal, ever-living, ever-present God, in the struggles and joys of this day, we pray: for those who are overburdened, weighed down, demoralised, fearful or desolate because of what life has thrown at them... For those engulfed in pain and anguish, facing illness and death... For those troubled in mind and spirit, who find no peace or calm... For those alone and lonely, without friend or comfort... For those frightened and bewildered, who see no direction or purpose in their lives... Eternal, ever-living God, bless them all in this and every hour, in this and every step of life's journey. Amen.</p>
	<p>Lord's Prayer</p> <p>Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial,</p>

	<p>and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. AMEN^{vi}</p>
	<p>Hymn/song 6 - TIS 650 - Brother, sister, let me serve you</p>
	<p>We are sent out Lord, give us a way to go, a path to follow, a purpose to fulfil and meaning to our deeds.</p> <p>May the Lord bless us and keep us May His face shine upon us and be gracious to us May he lift up His countenance upon us and give us peace</p>
	<p>Benediction</p>
	<p>Thank you</p>

ⁱ [*Revised Common Lectionary*](#). (2009). Bellingham, WA: Faithlife.

ⁱⁱ [*Revised Common Lectionary*](#). (2009). Bellingham, WA: Faithlife.

ⁱⁱⁱ . Charles Handy, *THE AGE OF PARADOX* (Boston: The Harvard Business School Press, 1995).

^{iv} Morton T. Kelsey, *TRANSCEND* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1981), p. 192.

^v Howard G. Hendricks, William D. Hendricks, *LIVING BY THE BOOK* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991).

^{vi} English Language Liturgical Consultation, 1988