

## LIFE GOES ON

[Written in oral form]

John 17:6-19; Acts 1:1-15, 21-26

May 16, 2021

Easter 7, Year B

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Today is the last Sunday of the Easter season.

Next Sunday is Pentecost.

Our general theme has been "Growing in Christ."

I do find it baffling that some people do not grow, but instead their relationship and understanding of God remains unchanged.

I think spiritual growth requires honesty and truth.

Honesty and truth are also essential in living in the present.

I receive daily emails from the Enneagram Institute and from Richard Rohr. They both frequently tell me to live in the present.

With the pandemic blur, I find the present hard to access.

*Is today yesterday or is it the day before?*

So, I am trying to be more intentional about focussing on the moment and the little things.

I do think that living in the present includes a healthy and realistic view of the future. That means we know we are finite and in honesty, have very little power to control things.

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That is the situation in the Acts text.

The believers in Jesus were gathered in Jerusalem waiting for whatever comes next. They knew they had little control.

Interestingly, there were only 120 of them. ONLY 120. <

Knowing that they had little control over the future, they decided it was prudent to face the future with 12 designated disciples. Judas was dead, so they must have concluded that if Jesus thought 12 was the number to have, then so be it.

The one criterium was that the person was a follower of Jesus from the beginning of his ministry. Obviously, more than just the 12 followed Jesus around.

Two people qualified, so they decided to cast lots to determine who it would be.

This was done with either marked sticks or stones; it was much like casting dice.

Making decisions in such a way was common. There are 31 cases cited in the Bible. Casting lots proved there was no human bias or interference in the decision.

And, the result ended all debate on the topic or selection.

To be sure, they first prayed for God's interference / God's influence on how it played out.

Although similar to gambling, it is more like flipping a coin.

*Still, I think buying lottery tickets prompts a lot of prayer, too.*

*But, I do not think God changes the odds.*

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Matthias won the toss, and became the new disciple.

Judas was a shocking disappointment. He was gone.

Their future was a mystery, and Jesus was gone.

But life went on.

Things change; people die, and Life Goes On.

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The John story precedes the Acts account, and it is also about transition—Life moving on.

Jesus knew he was facing death and his time on earth would soon end.

This awareness invites tender honesty and humility.

Jesus was talking with God, and he confessed his faithfulness.

He stressed his life and message was all about God.

He shared that he had passed his ministry on to his followers.

Jesus was letting go.

Stating "all mine is yours" is another confession of letting go.

He blessed his followers, asking that God protect them.

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Jesus was keenly in the raw moment.

In some ways, he had moved on to a different level.

He said he is not of this world.

Moreover, he stated that his followers do not belong to this world. I think that is a statement of faith in them, maybe even a projection.

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I did not understand that other world regard until I visited my closest, high school friend when he was dying of cancer. He was 36.

I made a dumb comment about a procedure he had. I said, "That must have been embarrassing." I was trying to be light.

He looked right through me and said, "Oh, I am way beyond that."

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Facing death / accepting death tends to open a person to a new, transcendent awareness.

Our walls and barriers fade away, and we see more clearly.

This is the place where Jesus was.

He knew Life was moving on, life in the broad sense.

An essential part of this sharp perception includes knowing that Life is much more than our own being, essence.

We are just contributors. We do our part, for a while.

Life carries on. Life goes on.....without us.

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When I moved to Kansas, I was surprised to discover that continuum.

I was raised in Toronto, and mostly lived in large cities after that. People in cities live in their own separate community.

Death happened, and those people disappeared, gone to some cemetery.

The church in Moundridge, Kansas was a small-town church.

There were a number of families with four generations attending, and near the church was the cemetery.

All knew that was their destiny.

My first reaction was “This is a conveyor belt to the grave.”

From babies to elders they were marching to the cemetery.

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I soon discovered the deep beauty in this “wholeness” in the life process.

Accepting death, it turns out, is very freeing and uplifting.

Life goes on. We caress and love our engagement, yet only loosely hold on.

Standing in the shadow of death causes a person to grasp and cherish what is truly precious and wonderful.

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This freeing insight often is associated with someone on their death bed.

I fondly recall Ralph Lebold’s experience.

He was fortunately alert when he was close to death. He invited people to his side so that he could give them a blessing,....and to release them....as he was being released.

It was a beautiful experience.

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Nevertheless, we need not wait until our body is near the end to acquire this profound awareness.

St. Benedict of the 6<sup>th</sup> century said, “Keep death daily in your eyes.”

A Catholic nun, Sister Aletheia, has made it her mission to revive the practice of “memento mori”. [NY Times 5/14/21]

That is Latin for “Remember your death.”

Although she is only 40 years old, she has learned that meditating on mortality is freeing.

Sister Aletheia asserts that living with death’s closeness cultivates meaning in life and helps us focus on the moment—the present.

She has observed that, these days, death is rarely noticed. It even seems exotic.

She encourages people to reclaim finitude/mortality in order to enhance spiritual life... and life in general.

After all, in truth, we are just part of the whole.

She also stressed that suffering and death are part of normal life. Therefore, it is better to accept it than feel assaulted.

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Death does seem removed. The pandemic has raised some awareness, but not much.

Life expectancy, from birth, in Canada is 80 years for men and 84 for women.

In 1920 it was overall 40 years.

In 1800 it was under 30, and it was like that since the bronze age.

In the 1800's, parents would sometimes give two children the same name in the hope that one of them would survive to carry that name.

Thanks to vaccines and antibiotics, we have pushed death to beyond the horizon, unseen until that threshold is approached.

Richard Rohr, in his book "Falling Upward" says there are two halves in life. The second half happens when we learn to let go and truly become alive, alive in the present.

He does highlight that this new awareness need not be age dependent. Anyone, including Jesus' disciples can acquire a sense of not being confined by the world.

Now, I would never, ever question Richard Rohr, but I think that second half insight can oscillate and the transformation can be slow and inconsistent.

We humans tend to waiver, even when the better way is obvious.

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Letting go and being in honest touch with the present which includes our finitude is essential.

We hold little sway over tomorrow, and it is freeing to accept that.

With that in mind, I do wonder if it is better to avoid making plans for our own funeral. That desire does reveal a need in taking control over the event.

Perhaps, part of the exercise of letting go can include leaving our own funeral plans to those who carry on.

Because,.....life goes on...without us.

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When I consider the broad spectrum of life, wall paper comes to mind.

But first a warning!

If you choose to have wall paper, Do Not hang it with your partner or anyone you love.

You can hang wall paper with someone you do not like or hire a contractor.

Just take my word on this one.

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Wall paper is décor that adds a degree of comfort.

It also is a covering. The images are not personal, just familiar and nice.

When I was quite young, my wall paper had images of Red Skelton, Bob Hope, Jack Bennie, Billy Graham, the Beatles and so on.

All were impersonal, just icons of the time, not influential.

One by one, they were replaced with my own selections, such as Andy Warhol, Herman Hesse, John Denver, Ram Das, Robin Williams, and so on.

As happens with wall paper, it fades. Some images peeled off/ they died. My room began to look tattered and sparce.

This happens when we age.

It is tempting to replace them. There is the allure to put up a new covering. Some would call that a midlife crisis.

Reflecting on Richard Rohr's advice, I am in the process of letting the bare walls be exposed.  
I am finding this to be a lonely experience. I am missing the icons and stalwarts that brought me the illusion of security and comfort.

Yet, they were illusions and not the truth.

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I think our possessions and constructions confine us and limit our view.

We are not contained by our shell, nor are we defined by it.

We are in the process of living.... of dying and moving on.

Life Goes on, and it is glorious to be in it for the moment.

Accepting this humbling truth helps us grown in Christ.