

"Do You Have Life in You?"

John 6:53, 63, Proper 15-B, August 16, 2015

John 6:53, 63: "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you! It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is of no avail."

Friend, do you have life in you? You might think that this is a rather strange question I am asking you this morning; for after all, here you are sitting right there in your pew, right here in front of me with your **heart obviously beating to circulate blood** throughout your veins and arteries, and with your **lungs pumping oxygen to rejuvenate every cell** in your body too! Your eyes are open! Obviously you have life in you! -- **But not so fast! For just as the word "love" means many different things to many different people, the word "life" has different definitions too.**

In the Greek language of the New Testament there are three different words that are all translated with the English word "life," just as there are three different words that are all translated with the English word "love."

"Bios" is that Greek word that refers to physical life, from which we derive the word **"biology!"**

"Psyche" refers to the presence of our human personalities, from which we derive the word "psychology."

"Zoe" refers to the **divine life, the uncreated life, which is God himself.**

We can take academic courses in biology and psychology to study both the physical lives and the psychological conditions of ourselves and of our fellow human beings. But in order to study the word **"zoe"** we need to turn to the **GOSPEL OF JOHN and allow ourselves to come under the guidance of the illuminating instruction of the Holy Spirit.** This kind of study involves prayer so that our minds may become enlightened with the light of life!

"Zoe" or life is a very popular theme all throughout John's Gospel. In chapter one we read of Christ, **"In him was life and the life, and the life was the light of all people" (v. 4).**

The Bible teaches us that we human beings, as we are born into this world have **"bios,"** that is, physical life; and we human beings also have **"psyche"** human personalities but **what human beings lack in their natural state as they are born into this world is "zoe;" the divine life.** Thus, in the Gospel of John, Jesus states right in the middle of his **"Good Shepherd"** discourse in John 10:10, **"I have come that you might have life and have it more abundantly!"**

God became a man in the gift of his Son so that we might not only have a physical existence in this world, and a powerful mental component adjacent to our human physiologies, but so that we might also have a **real relationship with the God who not only created us and this world and everything in it, but who created the whole universe too!**

In the **third** chapter of **John**, one very curious Pharisee by the name of Nicodemus comes to Jesus one night with a lot of confusion that he presently had about Jesus in his knowledge of our Savior: **"Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one could do these signs that you** (like Jesus having just turned water into wine at the wedding of Cana) **do unless God is with him.**

“Jesus answered him, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God!’” (John 3:1-3) Now Nicodemus was all the more confused. But Jesus repeated himself, saying: ***“Truly, truly, I say unto you, except a man be born again of water and the Spirit, he can in no way enter into the kingdom of God; for that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit! Do not marvel that I have said unto you, ‘You must be born again!’” (John 3:5-7).***

Here Nicodemus was not yet able to distinguish the Greek word “bios” for life, from which we get “biology” from the Greek word “zoe” which is used to speak of the **divine life; a spiritual knowledge of the God who created us and has made it possible for us to become reconciled to him, who by nature were all separated from him because of our sin.**

Speaking of Jesus the Life, John writes in the first chapter: ***“He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him! But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man but God!” (John 1:11-13)***

The Apostle John’s great emphasis on life becomes all the more apparent to us when we learn that he uses that Greek word “zoe” five times more in his Gospel account than does Matthew, Mark, or Luke in their Gospel accounts.

In **John 5**, our Lord says, ***“For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will. Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life!” (Vv. 21, 24)***

Then listen to those audacious claims Jesus makes for himself in the Gospel lesson today, ***“I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh” (John 6:51)***

What does it mean to have life in you? It means to believe on Jesus Christ and to put our own personal trust in him for our soul’s salvation. By faith God longs for us to have a direct experience of him in our lives. We come to believe that what he is telling us is true. That he is a God of love, who in his great love for a fallen humanity, suffered the greatest loss he could ever have possibly suffered as the God of all creation, in giving his Son’s own perfect life into death on a cross to redeem us from our sins and to fulfill all righteousness for us!

When Jesus raises **Lazarus** from the dead, he claims: ***“I am the resurrection and the life and the one who believes on me, even though he died, yet shall he live, and the one who lives and believes on me shall never die!” (John 11:25).***

Later on in the Upper Room Jesus further says: ***“I am the way, the truth, and the life!” (John 14:6).*** And following his own resurrection when he appears to ten of the eleven remaining disciples that first Easter evening, when the doors were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, ***“Peace be with you.” When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord! Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” And when he had said this he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit of God. If you forgive the sins of anyone they are forgiven; if you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld” (John 20:19-23)!***

When John nears the end of his Gospel, he writes in **John 20:30-31**, ***“Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples which are not written in this book but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name!”***

But if I am hearing Joshua correctly in our Old Testament lesson, and St. Paul correctly in our epistle lesson, it **all depends on how much attention we are really willing to give to the living Word of God, doesn't it?**

Years ago, I remember talking to a man who was a founding member of this congregation who was also a veteran of World War II. This man's name was **Baker Meetze**, a faithful member of this church from the time it came into being, who died in 2006 at the age of 83. Following the war he became a skilled carpenter and devoted his life to building new homes all throughout his career.

I can remember him telling me: "Pastor Sizemore, when I joined the Army I sure was surprised when the commanding officer came to me one day and told me I was being invited to become a paratrooper. Here I had never even flown in an airplane before and now I was being asked to jump out of one. I accepted the challenge, especially when my commanding officer told me I'd earn \$50 more a month, when \$50 was a whole lot more back then than it is today!" I can remember Mr. Meetze further telling me, **"WHEN I WAS TAKING THOSE INSTRUCTION CLASSES ON HOW TO FOLD UP MY PARACHUTE, JUMP FROM AN AIRPLANE, HOW TO PULL THE RIPCORD AND SOMEHOW FLOAT GENTLY TO THE GROUND, NO ONE EVER HAD TO POKE ME IN THE RIBS TO SAY: "PAY ATTENTION!"**

Why? Because I knew that my life was at stake! Therefore, I hung on to every word the instructor spoke to me!

But how are we really when it comes to listening to the Word of God? Apart from the life of God and the very life of Jesus Christ being dispensed to us through the Gospel, we can easily fall into the trap of giving our primary allegiance to all sorts of false gods around us!

1. But Joshua does remind us that we do have a choice to worship or not to worship, and who or what we will worship and who or what we will not worship.

Please notice that Joshua puts the call to worship and to serve the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in to a most urgent way! **"Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord!"** And **"choose this day whom you will serve,"** are all imperatives; commands in the use of human speech and language.

But as forceful as Joshua is, **he knows he cannot chose for everybody else, even as Jesus did not force people to become his followers either.** You might remember that shortly his triumphant ride into Jerusalem that first Palm Sunday, he was looking upon the city of Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives one day, weeping over that city and saying: ***"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you that kill the prophets and stone them that are sent to you, how often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!"*** (Matthew 23:37)

2. Joshua's words teach us that people will worship something or serve someone.

We can easily worship the false god of **materialism**, forgetting what Jesus told that jealous brother one day because he thought his older brother was getting far too big of a chunk of his earthly father's estate: ***"Be careful, for a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions!"***

We can easily succumb to the **false god of hedonism**, believing that the highest good in life is deriving **every ounce of pleasure from life that we possibly can.**

While we are commanded to be good stewards of our physical bodies, we can make false gods of our **physical health.** And even as much as the Bible tells us to honor our fathers and mothers,

Jesus cautions us against making a false god of family too: “He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me, and he who does not deny himself and take up his cross and follow me can in no way become my disciple!” (Matthew 10:37-39)

That’s why Joshua is challenging the people of Israel, now that they have finally arrived as the second generation of Israelites into the Promised Land, not to forsake the true God!

3. The third thing that Joshua teaches us is that there will be some kind of response.

These words are not words that can simply be passed by on the other side of the street the way that the priest and the Levite passed by on the other side of the road, completely ignoring the man who had been beaten up and left for dead on the road to Jericho in Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan!

This is not some kind of “take home” test where we mail in the answers on our own schedule. **“Choose THIS DAY,”** Joshua says, **“whom you will serve!”**

“Do you also wish to go away?”

Jesus asks; expecting an answer in that present moment!

In the **Broadway musical “Tomorrow,” Annie may sing, “Tomorrow, tomorrow, the sun will come up tomorrow,”** but Joshua is talking about today, before the sun goes down!

But if I want you to take anything home with you today out of this sermon, concerning the critical moments in our lives, when our eternal destiny may well be hanging in the balance, this is it: THE CHOICE IS HIS! God is the one who has chosen us to be his very own people, long before any of us have ever chosen him to become our God!

For in the middle section of our Old Testament lesson today from Joshua 24, God is reminding his people: **“Long ago your father lived beyond the Euphrates, and I took your father Abraham from beyond the River and led him through all the land of Canaan, and made his offspring many.**

Then I brought your fathers out of Egypt, and you came to the sea. And the Egyptians pursued your fathers with chariots and horsemen to the Red Sea. And when they cried to the LORD, he put darkness between you and the Egyptians and made the sea come upon them and cover them—and your eyes saw what I did in Egypt.

I gave you a land on which you had not labored and cities that you had not built, and you dwell in them. You eat the fruit of vineyards and olive orchards that you did not plant!”

St. Paul is writing the Ephesians in our second lesson today, asking them **to choose to live in obedience to God’s commands, because the days are evil. But listen again how Paul begins that magnificent letter: ³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly**

places, ⁴ just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. (Ephesians 1:2-4)

On the night before he died, Jesus said to his disciples: ***“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear much fruit, fruit that will last!” (John 15:16-17).***

So let me now ask you a question: **There are two frogs sitting on the bank of a pond** on a warm, sunny, summer afternoon. One of them decided to jump in? So how many are left on the bank? Your answer would probably be one, but not necessarily, because all I have told you is that **one of the frogs decided to jump in, but this doesn't mean that he actually followed through on his decision and jumped in.**

A young couple stands in front of the sanctuary one Saturday afternoon to say their wedding vows. They are nervous. They stumble over the words. He starts to put her ring on the wrong finger. They smile at each other. Their minister guides them through the order of the service because the minister knows it is an exciting and anxious time. **The minister also knows something else. The wedding is only the beginning of that marriage. That wife and husband may, with the blessings of Almighty God, move through the various seasons of life. Changes will come.** Maybe children will be a part of their lives. They will be changing diapers, teaching a child to ride a bike, and perhaps one day standing with their own daughter in a sanctuary, like this one, where they are now parents of the bride.

While Paul reminds us in **II Cor. 12:3**, ***“No one can say that Jesus Christ is Lord but by the Holy Spirit,”*** the decision still has to be personal.

Like the great statesman **Patrick Henry**, in the months leading up to the Revolutionary War stood in that historic church in Richmond, Virginia, saying: “I know not what others may do, but as for me, give me liberty or give me death!”

Unlike Baker Meetze, I have never jumped out of an airplane. In fact, I have no desire to jump out of an airplane. If I did, however, you can be certain that I would listen to every word being given to me, the way Baker Meetze did, of those all-important words of the teaching and instructions!

It all depends upon the kind of reception we are willing to give to the Word of God. And especially to the Word of God made flesh in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ.

There are those who contend that Jesus is not speaking literally here, but figuratively. But those people are the same people who say that even though Jesus says in chapter 9, I am the door to the sheep pen, in chapter 10, I am the Good Shepherd, in chapter 15, I am the true Vine and you are the branches—he is only symbolically here! Jesus is not really the door, the good shepherd and the vine, but actually he is—he is all of these things in relationship to us who seek to genuinely listen and become obedient to his voice, who know that it is important that we remain as branches connected to the Vine. We see Jesus speaking to us about the Lord's Supper here. If this were not the case how Jesus defend it so powerfully.

“After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. So, Jesus said to the Twelve, “Do you want to go away as well?”

Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed and have come to know that you are the Holy One of God!” (John 6:66-69) Amen