

John 6:51-58    8.15.24    Pentecost 13    Bill Uetricht

After confronting the readings for today, I couldn't help but think about the *good life*. Proverbs speaks of wisdom, and wisdom is fundamentally about *the good life*. Our Psalm directly asks: "Which of you desires life, and covets many days to enjoy good?" Who among you wants the *good life*? And then Ephesians gives us more about living wisely, living the *good life*. And then John, in what is a bit of a bizarre reading, has Jesus talking about eating, chomping on his flesh as the key to life eternal, the key to the *good life*. Everybody in the Bible today seems to be searching for the good life.

But maybe that's not just true in the Bible. Maybe just about everybody is seeking the good life. I wondered if that is true. How could I find out? Well, You Tube, of course. Where else would you want to go to discover what people are talking about or, more poignantly, what they are singing about? I wondered if there were songs about the good life. Let me tell you. Lots of them. It's hard to beat Tony Bennett: "Oh, the good life." And of course, Frank Sinatra sang that song, although he had to change it a bit: "It's the good life."

But you know who else sang about the good life? You tube can be of great help. The somewhat odd Kanye West. I can't imitate him like I can Tony Bennett, so how about just a little taste. (Video played.) Welcome to the good life!

And it isn't just Kanye or Tony Bennet who sings of the good life. A nineties rock group called Weezer, with great existential angst, sings, "It's time I got back to the good life. It's time I got back. I don't even know how I got off track. It's time I got back . . . to the good life."

Everybody's singing about the good life. Maybe everybody is seeking it. Perhaps John's Jesus knows that as he speaks often, including in today's text, about "eternal life." Eternal life. Life that is

full. Life that is always good. The Good Life. John's Jesus wants us to have the good life.

Well, what is it? What is the good life?

Jesus in John today says, "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, have the good life."

Huh? This is weird stuff. No wonder the Jews who are listening to Jesus start arguing among themselves. Jesus sounds like he is encouraging cannibalism. Eating flesh and drinking blood.

You know, one of the early critiques of the Christian community was that they practiced cannibalism. People overheard early Christians talking of eating Jesus and drinking his blood, and they concluded that they must be cannibals.

Well, Jesus' teaching in John is a little odd, a little over the top. "The bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh." Munch on it. Chomp on it, which is what the Greek really says. It doesn't say simply eat his flesh; it says chomp on it, dig your teeth into it. Wow! That is odd, and I have to say, quite radical for the time. John's gospel is addressing an audience that is increasingly shaped by Greek culture and Greek thought. In Greek thought, the divine realm was often viewed as being very different from the human realm. You wouldn't hear Greeks talk of chomping on or munching on God. That would be sacrilegious.

You want the good life? Chomp on me. Dig your teeth into me. Now for sure, I think in the reading from John we are overhearing John's audience struggle with this thing called communion, the eucharist. I suspect they are trying to figure it out, trying to understand it. Communion was a part of the weekly, if not daily, practice of the early church. It was integral to who they were. And I

would suggest that it is integral to who we are. This isn't something we should do just every once in a while. It is something we ought to do all the time.

Why? Because the good life is not something we receive or participate in by standing at a distance. The good life is a life that we ingest, that we take into ourselves, that we munch on, that we chomp on. The good life, Jesus in John often says is a matter of abiding, dwelling, living in. It's a matter of going to the dance and actually dancing. It's a matter of not just watching sports but participating in them. It's a matter of having a friend not just in theory, but in practice—doing things with them, talking with them. It's a matter of having a marriage that is not just an idea, but a physical reality.

The good life is the engaged life. God is to be discovered in the midst of engaged, physical life. Paula D'Arcy has written: "God comes to us disguised as our life." We want to meet God? We open ourselves to the everyday, ordinary flow of everyday, ordinary life. We open ourselves up to our real lives.

You know, this is the opposite of what the good life looks like to many in our culture. The good life to many is what we don't have and what we don't live. The good life is what rich people live. The good life is what folks with notoriety live—you know, folks who do well in the polls, folks who are famous, folks who are good looking. The good life belongs to someone else. And so, we spend a lot of time trying to get it for ourselves. Maybe a bigger house will provide it. Maybe a Corvette. Maybe a few more items from Amazon. A few more pats on the back. Maybe our kids will get it for us. They'll become the soccer stars. They'll go to the absolutely best schools and succeed like we never did.

But what if God comes to us disguised as our life? What if the good life is actually found in the lives that we live? What if the invitation is to munch on real life?

The good life is the life that we don't stand at a distance from. The promise of the gospel is that God doesn't stand at a distance from us. In the bread and the wine, Jesus comes to live inside of us, us ordinary folks who live ordinary lives. The bread of life comes to live in us. The Good Life, you see, is life filled with connection, intimacy, relationship.

It's very interesting to me that the Bible as it talks about the good life, as it dishes out wisdom, often does so with a concern for the quality of our relationships. The ethical advice that the Bible gives tends not to be moralistic in nature. You know, "You are naughty, if you do thus and such." No, the ethical advice given to us in the Bible often focuses on relationship, what builds up relationship, what builds up community.

Again, listen to the Psalm for today. "Who among you wants the good life? Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from deceit. Seek peace and pursue it." The good life is life lived in relationship and in community. So tend to the relationship. Don't just say everything that comes to your mind. Discipline your tongue. Seek that which unites people, not tears them apart. The good life is not life lived on the basis of your narcissistic impulses. Often that is the torn-apart life, the crabby and angry life.

The good life is life where community flourishes, which is the truth that Ephesians today speaks of as it refers to making the most of the time, of not getting drunk with wine but with the spirit, of singing songs, hymns, and spiritual songs." The author of Ephesians has argued in the first part of his letter that God in Christ has made Jew and Gentile one, has broken down the walls that divide us. To

live in accord with that truth, to live wisely, to help maintain the good life, we must pay attention to the things that can easily destroy it, that can tear apart community and destroy relationships.

The failure to steward our time well and the misuse of alcohol and other substances contribute to the destruction of relationships and the disintegration of community.

But music, on the other hand, can build it up. Why do we place such a great emphasis on music around here? Why do you think we sponsor concerts? Because music and the joy it brings can build community. I left our concert on Wednesday night with the Steeple Hill band on fire because the angst-ridden fiddle and the joy-filled vocalists and guitarists lifted my soul and connected me more to you all.

You want the good life? Pay attention to time. Do not let it tyrannize you. Fill it with good stuff. You want the good life? Be careful with the things that sometimes can end up running and ruining your life. You want the good life? Sing and make music. And do it in community.

“Oh, the good life.” (sung) It’s not something you have to get. It is something you have been given. It comes disguised as your life, your real life. Take it into yourself. Munch on it. Chomp on the bread of life. Chomp on Jesus. Give relationship its due. Dive in. And then do your part to nurture what you have been given. Do your part to build up this and every community.