

"The Life Well Lived"

Text: John 10:22-30

May the God who gave his own Son to pay our sin debt also now grant to each of us a love and dedication toward those things that are truly worthwhile. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

The English language, both spoken and written, is never static. It is always moving, shifting, fluctuating. Think lava lamp. Nothing is ever really added or subtracted (there are, after all, only 26 letters to work with) but those letters are continually being connected and used in different ways. The latest Oxford Dictionary lists over 47,000 words as obsolete, and about 1100 new words or usages are added each year. Nor is this a new, tech-based phenomenon. Although 20 years ago no one talked about "googling" something, or humans "tweeting," William Shakespeare is credited with creating 422 completely new and different words that are still in use today – common words like admirable, accessible, bedroom, buzzer, cheap, disgraceful, disgusting, employer, farmhouse, football, generous, homely, howl, lonely, motionless, obscene, pious, resolve, and over 400 others that simply didn't exist until Shakespeare made them up. It makes sense, in a way, that our language will always change, since human thought and societal trends are constantly shifting.

You know this instinctively, because you've heard new words like "trans" and "woke" and "selfie," and you get how they represent changes in our society. I've also noticed that the language of death also tends to shift over time. In our circles, no one seems to talk about a "funeral" anymore; it's always a "victory service." And no one wants to say "died." The "loved one" has always now "passed away." Along these general lines, one rather new phrase that struck me recently, although I've been hearing it for a couple of years now, is *"a life well lived."* You usually hear that at funerals (I mean, "victory services") in an effort to comfort the survivors. We all get the sentiment. Everyone understands that life on earth is a finite quantity, so the best the godless can hope for is to comfort themselves with the idea that the "dearly departed" packed as much as humanly possible into the time they had. That, to the world, is what makes a life "successful." (Another word that Shakespeare made up.)

I'm not sure how the world qualifies or quantifies "a life well lived." What must a life include to qualify for that classification? My sense is that they just take pretty much any old life and apply the label: "well lived." But what about us, Christians? What about you? Would you label your life as "well lived" if the Lord were to call you home today? What would be important for you to add, if you could?

This is the general question we seek to answer this morning: What, for the child of God, constitutes a life well lived? The text that will form the basis for our study is found recorded in the Gospel of John, the Tenth Chapter:

^{ESV} **John 10:22-30** *At that time the Feast of Dedication took place at Jerusalem. It was winter, ²³ and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the colonnade of Solomon. ²⁴ So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly." ²⁵ Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me, ²⁶ but you do not believe because you are not part of my flock. ²⁷ My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one."*

These are God's Words. That our God would through the study of these words spiritually strengthen us for the work that lies ahead, so we pray: **"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."** Amen.

Take just a moment and analyze this statement: *Jesus, as a true "man of God," was dedicated to his Father's business – doing for us what we could not do for ourselves.*

I'm sure that no one would have trouble with that statement. The Gospels (including our text) certainly portray Jesus as a man singly dedicated to "religious pursuits." Would you agree that Jesus' earthly walk represented "a life well lived"? From our perspective, absolutely. Jesus alone was able to offer the necessary payment for our sins. Human beings, once they have sinned, have no currency to offer the Righteous Judge as any sort of sin payment. Nothing we could ever do could undo the damage of our transgressions. We were and are lost apart from the work of Jesus as our substitute.

Had he not lived the life he did, we could have no life at all. Certain, in our view, a life well lived.

But what about from Jesus' perspective? A life of untold suffering that benefited always and only others, never himself? Is that the sort of life the world would consider ""well lived"? The direction arrow seems opposite. The world's arrow is always pointed to self – *"Did the one who has "passed" get at least most of what they wanted out of life?"* Amazingly enough, Jesus' answer would be yes, because his life wasn't about himself; it was about everyone else. The question that remains is what affect or direction his selfless dedication carries forward to us.

We are not surprised when we read in our text that Jesus was found walking in the temple in Jerusalem during the Feast of Dedication. That is, after all, a fitting place for a "man of God." The problem is how we *react* to our Lord's dedication. In other words, the temptation is always there to imagine that since Jesus was so dedicated, we don't have to be. Since Jesus did for us what we could not do for ourselves, therefore we are now free to be about our own business, rather than our Father's.

Could it possibly be true that just as there were things that only *Jesus* could do, so now there are also things that only *man* can do? Sounds strange, doesn't it? Yet by God's own decree that is exactly the case today. Jesus himself rendered the payment for sins and thereby reconciled sinners to God. Only he could do that. Yet that payment is of no benefit to the individual who never hears about it. Here is where we come in, since this gospel proclamation is not Jesus' work, it is ours. Jesus entrusted Christians with more than just the possession of the message of the gospel. He left us with the *proclamation* or *dissemination* of that message. It is left to us as Christians to communicate to the world exactly what Jesus has done for mankind. This is the focus, the goal, the burden that should be felt by every single Christian every single day. The Holy Spirit has chosen not to work faith directly from heaven. He works through the Word that Christians have been commissioned to share. Since our Savior has given us the sharing of his good news as our life's work, doesn't it stand to reason that that would be the key component in the Christian's definition of *the life well lived*?

The actual converting of souls, by the way, is not part of our job description, just the sharing or communication of that which carries that power. Our text proves that. Jesus was the master communicator, yet the Jew refused even his unique message, which included miracles. We can therefore not only learn to communicate better by studying his

example, we also learn here that sometimes the message is just refused. In other words, even a perfect, powerful revelation of the gospel will at time, maybe even frequently, fall on deaf ears.

You recall in our text how the Jews surrounded Jesus in the temple and demanded that he tell them whether or not he was the Christ. Jesus' answer was that he *had* told them – that he had, in fact, been telling them for several years. The miracles served as irrefutable proof that Jesus was the Messiah. They spoke clearly and definitively to anyone and everyone who bothered to "listen."

What the Jews were doing here was sort of like walking up to some big, burly guy and asking him if he is really strong. Rather than answering with words, the guy walks over and picks up the back end of a bus and sets it back down. Next he walks over to a fire hydrant, grabs hold of it, snaps it off and tosses it about half a city block. Finally he walks to a railroad track, rips up one of the steel rails, bends it into the shape of a pretzel, and drops it at your feet. To all of which the Jews would then say, *"How very nice. So, are you strong or aren't you?"*

Why did the Jews demand a verbal affirmation of what the miracles so clearly demonstrated, and why did Jesus refuse? The Jews asked because they wanted to use his answer to condemn and kill him. Jesus refused because he knew they would do just that, and it wasn't yet time. He still had more life to live well. He *did* answer the question eventually, didn't he? At his trial on Good Friday he gave them a clear and unequivocal answer to the same question that they here asked, and the result was immediate condemnation and execution. Understand that these folks were shot through with evil. They didn't want to become disciples. They wanted Jesus dead.

Jesus therefore allowed the miracles to communicate to the people, for who could possibly condemn him for the good that he did? Who could condemn a man for feeding the poor, healing the sick, making whole the handicapped, or raising the dead? Every single one of these actions delivered a loud and clear message to all who saw or heard of them: *This man is different! This man is sent from God!* That's also why Jesus said what he did in our text: ***"I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me, ²⁶ but you do not believe because you are not part of my flock."***

Yet note that it was not the miraculous healing and feeding that constituted Jesus' well-lived life – although that's how the world still sees it. Everything that Jesus did was part of his singular goal, which was to provide for mankind a perfect Savior. To put in another way, all of Jesus' combined social goodness would have been labeled an absolute failure if he had sinned, even just once.

What then, again, would constitute a *life well lived* for you and me? We obviously know enough to rule out earthly wealth, power, and popularity, but what about a life of community service and doing good to others? While such things aren't *bad*, in and of themselves, they don't get us where we want to be, do they? Those things all end here, on this earth, and there is a whole eternity after this life. In the end, then, it's all pretty simple. Every life that ends with saving faith in the human heart is a good life. No matter what you and I have or don't have in this life, no matter what we achieved or didn't achieve, no matter what we experienced or didn't experience, to die in Christ constitutes a good life – because eternity with our God will surely follow.

That's a *good* life, but is it a *life well lived*? It would be enough for *us*, but what about everyone else? The life well lived can't be just about us and our own salvation, because in his Great Commission Jesus taught us to be concerned also about others - about "all nations" in fact. The life well lived then includes the sharing of the message by which we ourselves have been brought from death to life. It has as its primary purpose the sharing of the simple truths about Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, who has already paid for the sum total of the world's sin. The life well lived means participating in the awesome process by which human souls are rescued. It means sharing the gospel, by which others become "sheep," who also then hear these words of their Savior with the same comfort and joy that they also now provide us: **"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one."**

Take some time here to digest the message of these words. Let them fill you, comfort you, encourage you. And then recognize that every single human being on earth has these same needs, whether it is the children that you raise and teach, the employee with whom you work, or the nursing home patient lingering at death's doorstep. Then acknowledge the fact that the life well lived is one where you participate, in whatever

small way, in the rescue of even one other human being. In the end, absolutely nothing else will matter. Amen.

Scripture Readings

^{ESV} **Acts 20:17-32** Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him. ¹⁸ ¶ And when they came to him, he said to them: "You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, ¹⁹ serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; ²⁰ how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, ²¹ testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. ²² And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, ²³ except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. ²⁴ But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. ²⁵ And now, behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again. ²⁶ Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all of you, ²⁷ for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. ²⁸ Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. ²⁹ I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; ³⁰ and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. ³¹ Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears. ³² And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

^{ESV} **Revelation 7:9-17** After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, ¹⁰ and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" ¹¹ And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹² saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen." ¹³ ¶ Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?" ¹⁴ I said to him, "Sir, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. ¹⁵ "Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. ¹⁶ They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. ¹⁷ For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

2510 E. Divide Ave. Bismarck, ND 58501

Parsonage and Office: (701) 223-4885 Cell: (701) 425-5483

Website: www.bismarcklutheran.org

Mark Johnson, President Angela Pfennig, Organist

Michael Roehl, Pastor

The Third Sunday after Easter – May 12, 2019

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 436 (Red Hymnal)

"The Lord's My Shepherd, I'll Not Want"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The First Lesson: (Acts 20:17-32) The thread that runs through our readings and sermon text this morning is sheep and their Good Shepherd. Jesus is obviously that Good Shepherd and we his sheep. Paul speaks to us in our first reading this morning, warning us as sheep that we should expect to be attacked by the enemies of the Good Shepherd – "**ferocious wolves**," as he calls them. His definition of a wolf is anyone who does not hold to the "**whole counsel**" of God's Word.

The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 118 (Page 29)

The Second Lesson: (Revelation 7:9-17) What great benefits we would receive if we would use the Book of Revelation as that for which it was intended - a book of comfort for God's New Testament Church. This morning we see a profoundly comforting picture of the Last Day. How perfect and exciting will be that day for those that are God's. How terrible for those who are not.

The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed – page 5. (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 324 (Stanzas 1-3) (Red Hymnal)

"Jesus Sinners Doth Receive"

The Sermon – Text: John 10:22-30 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"The Life Well Lived"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Prayers of the Day, Followed by the Lord's Prayer

The Pre-Communion Hymn – 324 (Stanzas 6-8) (Red Hymnal)

"Jesus Sinners Doth Receive"

The Preparation for Holy Communion (Brown Hymnal page 17)

The Distribution

The Nunc Dimittis and Thanksgiving (Brown Hymnal page 20)

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 52 (Red Hymnal)

"Almighty Father Bless the Word"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States, as well as Canada, India, and Africa. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again!

Attendance – Sunday (34) Average (34)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday school and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship and coffee hour
Wednesday	-6:00 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Bible Study
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday school and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Sunday Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship and coffee hour

CLC News – Teacher Graduate Nathan Buck has accepted the call to St. John's of Clarkston. Teacher Graduate June Schmid is considering the call to Faith of Markesan. Seminary Graduate Sam Naumann has accepted the call to Resurrection of Corpus Christi. Teacher John Ohlmann has returned the call to Holy Trinity of West Columbia. Prince of Peace of Loveland has called Pastor Paul Krause. Pastor Em. Art Schultz was called home on Tuesday of this past week. Blessed are those who die in the Lord.

Church Council Meeting – Due in part to scheduling problems and in part to a lack of pending or pressing issues, the Church Council is not scheduled to meet in May. If anyone has any business that needs to be addressed by the Council, please bring it to the attention of President Mark Johnson.

Confirmation Sunday – A reminder that June 2 is Confirmation Sunday at St. Paul. Holy Communion will be moved from May 26 to June 2, and a fellowship meal is planned.

The Branches – Renewals for Branches are now due. The cost is \$15.00/year for 4 issues. Checks are payable to, "The Branches," and should be sent to: Laura Wales, Subscription Manager, 8727 Forestview Lane North, Maple Grove, MN 55369. Online payments are also available via PayPal - you may contact Laura Wales at lewales@gmail.com.