

Sermon for 18 August 2024 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Scriptures: 1 Kings 2:10-12; 3:3-14; Psalter: 832 (; Response: 77 **“How great thou art, how great thou art.”**); Ephesians 5:15-20; John 6:51-58

Sermon

Life continues.

As grade-schoolers, we did a lot of singing in WWII. All the armed forces' songs: “Anchors Aweigh...”, “Over hill, over dale, we have hit the dusty trail,” “From the halls of Montezuma,” “Off we go, into the wild, blue yonder, flying high, into the sun” .... and then “When the lights come on again, all over the world...” It was a big deal in history, fighting to keep the world free for democracy...

King Solomon was the big moment in Israel's history. Writing about it, as captives in Babylonia, they lifted it up as the crown of times to which the God was surely leading history ... and it's no wonder that the early Christians built on that idea of a Messiah who would end the age and complete Creation.

Amy Jill Levine is a fantastic Bible history professor recognized throughout at least a strong streak of contemporary American Protestantism ...She's one of the stars at Duke University in Methodist Divinity School ... a fully, sincerely orthodox Jew... bringing both Jesus and the Old Testament to life .... and sincerely unconverted. “It hasn't happened,” she says. “ Nothing's straightened out, no messiah reigns...” and we love her, respect her... she's a solid scholar and a fine preacher and teacher.

History happens, and goes on ...

Vivian and I have been reading a book by a 103-year-old missionary doctor who's still got a ten-year plan, as she always had. She says it's the only way to live, as much as you can ... The “juice” of life is worth every bit of trust you can give to it, as long as you can, until the next stage comes and it's not yours to manage any more ...

And the latest United Methodist News gives us several award-receiving Methodists who have done things like, for instance, a bishop who has gone seven times to Ukraine to encourage and pray with those who have suffered there, and a deaconess who has risked her life to lead resistance to mobs killing people in the Philippines over political arguments, and a whole group of churches in Mississippi who have struggled mightily to rescue and provide for the children of people who have been imprisoned and sometimes sent back across the border in raids carried on by our guards in moments of high political stress. People go on living. Christians do their thing, along with all kinds of others who follow the path of justice and lovingkindness.

It's not so surprising that there came a time in the early years after Jesus' death and resurrection when a genius gave us words like "this is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that the ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever." How else could we express what has been revealed to us in this simple, portable sacrament of Holy Communion that either centers or symbolizes our weekly worship gatherings? Life continues. Endings come and go, but the hope, the revelation, the uplifting trust that we are, as Genesis says, images of God, continues. What brings us to life, and what carries us forward alongside death, is the vision, the aim, the energy of answering God's love with what is within us by God's grace. We are capable of loving as God loves.

That is all we know, and all we need to know.

Other great religions may express it differently, but they have the same essence, if we see what Christ offers eyes to see. Love one another, love your neighbor as yourself ... that you might have life, and have it abundantly.

This is the word we come together to express and to learn ... and I am so grateful to each of you who faithfully continue to honor this vision and learn to live and share it.

Thanks be to God. Amen.