

Live til you die - 18 Sept 2022.

I decided to break with protocol today and not preach on the gospel, except to make sure that you aren't confused by what might seem to be a strange comment by Jesus.

Verse 9 of our reading from Luke today says, ' I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.'

The clue to the meaning of this instruction is the word, 'eternal'.

What Jesus is not saying is "Go and buy yourselves a load of cake friends". A 'cake friend' is the sort I used to get in boarding school when your mother sent you a cake, and all of a sudden you were the most popular boy

in the school, with boys rushing up to you saying, "give me a piece of your cake, and I'll be your friend for life!"

You were lucky if the so-called 'friendship' lasted as long as it took the person to swallow the cake.

The injunction is to use your worldly wealth to good effect - in the same way as you would by inviting the poor and the lame and the blind and the beggars into your feast, and not just those who will pay you back in kind.

Those are the people who will really be grateful for your generosity and make you aware that you have spent your money wisely.

They are the friends who will welcome you into

heaven when your time comes. You won't see your 'cake friends' for dust - or cake crumbs.

So now that's out of the way I want to get down to what is on my heart; that is that I want us all to learn how to live until we die.

That may sound like a rather strange statement, but it is a world away from just 'existing until we check out.'

In this last week I have been treating two dogs - well, the owners really. One dog is very elderly and the vet is muttering that all sorts of dire things might be happening with this animal, and the owners really ought to get this

test and that test and the other test done to see what's going on.

The other dog is a young one, and it is the owner who is getting elderly and is struggling to control his large and boisterous 16 month old Labrador Retriever.

In the first case, the dog, a lovely soft old spaniel has got the shakes when he stands up sometimes; he's pretty deaf and doesn't see so well, but he's engaged and happy and playful and pleased to be alive. He shakes because he's getting old - some of us do, don't we? As soon as he settles down, the shakes stop and he's as still as a clam. He is not ill, he is getting old - but he does not need a whole host

of unnecessary and crippling expensive investigations that will not alter his existence or management one iota. He needs to be allowed to enjoy his life until it's his turn to cross the Rainbow Bridge.

In the second case, the owner needs some help to train a spirited but wonderfully enthusiastic dog who - truth be told - is really a bit big for this older gentleman who suffers with a bad back. So I help with training and obedience. It is the owner who needs to be able to enjoy his remaining years in the company of a dog he has undoubtedly fallen in love with, but is having difficulty handling just now. I can help with that.

And I have to say that the joy I get in helping this man begin to realize that he may not have to give up his dog if he learns how to handle him makes me tear up. Both dog and owner love each other to bits - but they just haven't quite learned to speak each other's languages yet. Fortunately, I am fluent in both human and dog, so I am in a position to help.

So what the dickens has this to do with Jesus, the gospel, the bible, or life in general?
Everything.

We know so well that Jesus told us that he had 'come to give us life in all its fullness', but how often we barely give this statement a

passing thought, and carry on griping and grumbling our way through our lives, whining about this or that, and how we've got so much to do and no time to do it.

I don't know if you've ever found yourself with too much time on your hands and nothing to fill it with - but that is very much more depressing, believe me.

Can you imagine being in prison, in solitary confinement, with nothing to occupy your mind for months or perhaps years? What wouldn't you give for a really busy day? No wonder some folks go crazy inside.

But living is not necessarily about being busy; it is also about being in connection with others

sometimes, and your God at all times. Paul said in his epistle to Timothy today that 'there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people.'

Now some folks have got off on the wrong foot, and have invented all sorts of intermediaries - Mohammed, Krishna, Buddha, Zoroastra, endless saints in the Roman Catholic Church, along with Mary and even the Pope.

It's not their fault - it's how they were brought up, but a little investigative thought and research on those people would show them

they were wrong. There never has been, nor ever will be another human being like Jesus.

I'm sure that many of you have heard the Tim McGraw song, 'Live like you were dying', - well, there are parts of that song which are really good advice; 'I loved deeper, and I spoke sweeter, and I gave forgiveness I'd been denying.' There are other bits that I wouldn't advise; 'I went 2.7 seconds on a bull named Fu Man Chu.' That's likely to hurt when you land.

Part of learning to live - really Live - with a capital 'L', is to cultivate an attitude of gratitude. Find something every day to be grateful for - especially when you are having a

shitty day. Be grateful for having had some breakfast to eat, some clothes to wear, a roof over your head; I have been in situations where I have not had these things - although I've usually had something to wear, thankfully.

It has a lot to do with why we come to church; we come to say 'Thank You' to the God of our understanding - the Great Spirit of the universe and soul of Jesus Christ. Why?

Because we daily screw up, and Jesus says that if we recognize both this fact and his payment of our dues, then we are absolved - forgiven - and can start anew each morning.

If we lose that sense of gratitude, then it will go badly for us; let me give you an example.

Suppose - just suppose - that your spouse brought you breakfast in bed one morning - an entirely loving gesture out of the blue. You are overwhelmed, and effusive in your gratitude. Your spouse feels happy and valued and the sense of love between you deepens.

Then just suppose that he or she does it again the next day and the next - you continue to be hugely grateful and things are as good as can be. Suppose that he or she keeps this up for a month and then suddenly stops? What is your response?

Is it "Where's my bloody breakfast?" Has familiarity bred contempt here?

What did you ever do to deserve having your breakfast in bed anyway? Did it ever occur to

you to get up just once and make it for her or him?

Is this not a danger when you think it's no longer worth going to church any more, because your forgiveness is guaranteed? Or that, so long as you turn up and chant the same old Gloria, Sanctus, Creed, Lord's Prayer - then that will do?

Sorry, folks, but that won't do - that is the one sin that Jesus says is unforgivable - that is a sin against the Holy Spirit - because now you are treating the eternal Spirit of the Universe with contempt - you are saying - "Where's my bloody breakfast? - Where's my bloody forgiveness?"

What happened that this awful situation came about? I'll tell you - you lost your sense of gratitude. You forgot how wonderful it was when your spouse brought you breakfast in bed for the first time - and you have forgotten how wonderful it was when you realized for the first time that Jesus had taken away your sins - and continues to do that every day.

And now what happens to your life? I'll tell you; you start complaining, you start whining, you start saying you don't have enough of this or that. You have shifted along the balance of the seesaw or teeter-totter from the heart end to the money or material end - and you

begin to die - from the inside, little by little, day by day.

How easy it is to choose to live and not die daily - so why do we not do it?

I know some dogs who could teach you.