

ὁ λόγος παρακλήσεως
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There's more to life

In nomine...

I. Intro

Have you heard the expression, “There more to life than...”?

There's more to life than work. There's more to life than sex. There's more to life than food. And, dare I say it in South Jersey? There more to life than football!

I notice that phrase rarely gets filled in with what that “more to life” is. That's usually left as an exercise for the hearer. Maybe because there's more to life than any brief explanation will cover. There are lots of things that different ones of us could suggest as a part of that “more to life.” But Jesus found a pretty good way to sum it up. Jesus called the “more to life” the Kingdom of God.

Why is there a tradition of fasting or giving something up for Lent? Maybe because sometimes we need a reminder that there's more to life than meat on Fridays. Or caffeine. Or eating out. And going without certain pleasures can help us to remember the deeper goods we enjoy, the “more to life” that we still have despite our little fasts. Lenten observances are designed to pry our attention away from our smart phones and our busy schedules, and to create some space to gaze upon God instead. If you're looking for “more to life” then I would suggest what you're looking for is the Kingdom of God.

II. Thesis

The Bible talks a lot about the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is the reality that is more true than the one you might habitually look at. The Kingdom of God is the “more to life.”

A young person growing up in the tiny, isolated town of DeLeon, Texas may not have dreams any bigger than a few classes at the local community college, a full-size pick-up truck, and a job in the local bottling factory. And so they tend to shape their lives accordingly. But here in Glassboro, we know about Philadelphia, New York City, and Washington DC. And those who live in New York know about Hong Kong, Paris, Santo Domingo, and Bogotá. And so we each shape our lives accordingly, with more and more cosmopolitan dreams and understandings. There's so much more to the world than what you might have guessed if all you'd ever seen was contained in a small town in central Texas.

So Christians know the Kingdom of God. Yes, we still struggle with the same issues around finances, health, and relationships as everyone else. We still cry at the death of a loved one and miss their visible presence in our lives. But we have also caught glimpses of something bigger, something more real and more vital than the size of our paycheck or the condition of our lawn. And so we orient our lives around that bigger reality, not neglecting the finer details of our lives, but making decisions around them that don't make sense without the bigger picture, of which we have caught only a glimpse. But a glimpse is enough!

This is what we find in our readings today. Moses has been hiding out, stuck in the little world of his exile from Egypt and tending his father-in-law's sheep. Then God comes calling and invites Moses into a bigger story than he ever could have imagined.

In our epistle reading today, Paul writes of the Israelites passing through the sea and living in the desert. They were concerned about daily bread and survival. But they were actually enacting the great story of God's redemption and establishing a legacy that would last for the rest of time!

III. Good News

What is our Gospel about, then?

Certain people go up to Jesus to report about some terrible things that have happened. They recount the latest news: mass-murder in a place of worship, the catastrophic failure of a large engineered structure, resulting in the deaths of everyone involved. The working assumption was

that the victims had received just, God-ordained retribution for their sins. They worshiped the wrong way. They believed the wrong things. God was paying them back.

Jesus disagrees. And he has two things to say:

1. Terrible things happen. That's how a world where God has given freedom and agency to human-kind is. We have freedom and agency to spread hate, violence, and war.
2. If you remain stuck, fixated on that world of human freedom and agency, that world is going to kill you, too. That's what happens in that little world.

The story of the Bible is the story of God's invitation to humankind to broaden our vision and to catch a glimpse of how much bigger the world is than our little worlds of personal freedom and agency.

What Jesus calls for is for his hearers to Repent. That's a good Lenten idea, isn't it, repentance? But repentance isn't about keeping certain rules and avoiding certain activities. Repentance is about turning aside, getting a new perspective, orienting your life according to what you know about the Kingdom of God rather than the dictates of human nature.

Life in the Kingdom of God understands that times of prayer, even silent, wordless, centering prayer, are world-changing, life-changing activities. Building a career for the sake of the income or the prestige is, in the end, less fundamentally less important, less world-changing.

Life in the Kingdom of God understands that giving to the poor, supporting the work of the Church, and using your time to serve others will make you immeasurably more wealthy than just pouring all that time and effort into enlarging the balance on your bank account.

Life in the Kingdom of God understands that loving your neighbor, speaking the truth, and refraining from gossip are infinitely more valuable than being popular or cool or revered on social media.

Life in the Kingdom of God involves remembering that which is more real than what you see on the news, in your paper, or on the Internet. It remembers that relationships and mutual love

are eternal forces, and that someday the Dow Jones and Game of Thrones and even real-world geo-politics will all be forgotten and irrelevant.

The call to repent is an urgent call. The only moment given to each of us is this moment right now. And this moment is enough. To repent is to change our point of view and to live *right now* with an eternal, Kingdom of God perspective.

IV. Invitation

The invitation is to a new point of view. And for sure, your behavior will change to match your new point of view. But behaviors aren't the point. Individual sins aren't really the concern. For your peccadilloes, Jesus offers forgiveness, full and free. The *point* is to change your point of view, to see the larger reality of God's Kingdom over which our culture and society is only a distorting overlay.

Often when we say "there's more to life than video games," we're urging someone we love not to miss out the great things in life by settling for what's simply flashy. Jesus' invitation in Luke, the church's invitation in Lent, is not to miss out on the Kingdom of God by settling for what wealth or hard work or the television can bring you. The Kingdom of God is freely given to you, but it involves giving up everything in order to open your hands to receive it.

Because there's more to life than what you've seen so far.

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