

LIFE IS PRECIOUS
[written in oral form]

Today, we have dedicated our lives and our children's lives to God.
We have also shown our appreciation to those who have donated a part of their lives in ministry through this church.
We do not take life for granted.
We have honoured life.....because we know that life is precious.

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Three of today's lectionary passages are about the value of life; each has virtually the same theme. The Psalmist, in Psalm 30, praised God for bringing him back from a near death experience. Both Elijah and Jesus travelled to a town, met a poor widow who's son had died, and each resuscitated the dead son. With the power of God, Elijah and Jesus, in their very similar stories, brought a child back to life.

To be sure, each story was included in the scriptures for a purpose, which was to reveal and confirm their special relationship with God. Everyone understood that only God was the giver of life, and therefore the miracle demonstrated the close/intimate relationship with God.

Elijah was just starting out as a prophet, and most people were skeptical about him, ... and he was disliked by King Ahab. So, his credentials needed to be bolstered. Restoring life to a dead person is impressive, and the news of such a miracle spreads rapidly. Likewise, people were awed and impressed by what Jesus did, and the miracle expanded their perception of Jesus, too.

Also, it needs to be stressed that both Elijah and Jesus were part of this miracle because they had concern and compassion for the widow. The resuscitation wasn't merely to "wow" people. Their primary motivation was compassion for the powerless widow they each met. And, God used the miracle for a purpose, too.

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Death is terribly sad.
We grieve when there is death.
Humans and all of creation grieve over death.
I've seen a squirrel hold her dead child for hours. Even ants will gently carry a killed friend back home, and plants mourn, too.
Life is precious. All life is precious.

Moreover, I truly like the acknowledgment that God is the giver of life and that life is precious to God, too.
That regard should humble us and grant us a deeper respect for life.

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I can only imagine what we humans would do if we assumed we can control life. We tend to evaluate life with selfish and myopic vision.

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Who knows what would happen if we took control?

We could casually use toxic herbicides to kill unwanted yellow flowers in our lawn.

Or, spray nasty pesticides in nature, and alter the genes in our crops so that they would somehow survive.

Can you image the overall carnage? But of course, no one would dare eat that treated and GM food.

That wouldn't seem wise.

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Or, we'd keep consuming fossil fuels even though we know doing so is killing life as we know it.

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And, the worst demonstration of humans claiming authority over life is of course war.

Tomorrow marks the 72nd anniversary of D-Day.

So many killed and were killed because we humans declared we can do that if we want to.

Then we have the audacity to speak for the dead, declaring that they gave their lives..... for a glorious cause.

It is interesting how we speak for the dead, how we rationalize the timing of someone else's death.

I imagine the millions and millions of dead soldiers, if they could speak, would say surprising things about the absurdity of patriotism and about their lives being cut short.

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The contentious Bill C-14 troubles me.

Granted, it's based on good intentions. Relieving misery is noble, yet medically assisting death is treading into a dangerous domain.

Should our society make such a declaration? Should we give official permission to control death / life?

I don't know. Sometimes things are not clear in the moment.

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Likewise, this is true when it comes to miracles, especially a miracle that brings life to the dead.

Sometimes things are not clear.

The miracle of resuscitation is very problematic. Selective miracles prompt provocative questions about justice / fairness. Such as:

Why are some healed, and not others..... or everyone?

Why are some protected, but not others?

Why were these two sons' life restored, and not other sons'?

Did Jesus not have compassion on everyone who was grieving?

And, the more personal question: why did my loved one die, and why did God choose to Not restore him or her?

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There have been too many unanswered cries, and too many endless tears,..... to dismiss these two miracles as merely marketing displays.

Why those sons, and not others? Why not in my case?  
(I've heard the protest many times: Why didn't God answer my prayers to save the one I love?)

This is a problem because we are inclined to conclude that God is unjust / unfair or God acts randomly, and that makes God dangerous.

Or..... we try to defend God with: "Oh, God had a good reason."  
Or, sadly, some think it was their own fault because they didn't have enough faith..... or they were not worthy of a miracle.

These stories about life restored are troublesome, YET..... let us not forget two poor widows who lost their sons too soon, were blessed by the renewing of life to their children.

Life is precious, and so is life restored.

Yet, we are troubled when events do Not seem fair or are inconsistent.

This inconsistency includes all selective miracles.

How do we reconcile the fact that God doesn't intervene all the time.

More broadly stated: "Why does an all powerful, omnipresent and just and loving God tolerate evil, allow some to suffer, while aiding others, and do miracles sometime, but not all the time?

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A logical answer is that God self limits.

An all powerful God could, but doesn't.

In regards to evil: if God acted to terminate all evil, it would affect all of us, and in theological reality, that would bring about the end of time.

So,..... we can accept that aspect of God self-limiting.

Moreover, a similar scenario would play out if God were to heal all brokenness, and wouldn't let anyone die..... too soon.

Since "too soon" is exceedingly subjective,..... it would have to mean no one would die.

Moreover, if all pain and suffering ended,..... then..... reality / the laws of life / the order of the universe would be erased.

Yet, ....we believe that God does intercede .... sometimes / miracles do happen..... How can that be..... and that doesn't seem fair?

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{Do you follow meso far?}

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I think God does interfere in the order of the universe,.....on occasion.

Jesus living on earth is an example, and so are miracles.

Systems can tolerate / handle some limited intrusions without breaking down.

We've disrupted the environment with our pollution and poisons, and the earth's bio systems has been durable and tolerant,..... until.... we go too far,..... and .....we may have.

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I think, out of compassion **and with a sense of purpose**, God does bend the rules of the universe. God does answer prayers.

Miracles do happen, and God does give direction and inspiration.

God does bend the rules, and for the same reasons of loving compassion and purpose, God does NOT destroy the rules.

God self limits..... for Our sake... and for the sake of all life.

And, by the way, don't let this understanding affect how you pray.

God can answer prayers in many ways that don't break the rules.

God has lots of tools that work within the system.

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Yet, when it comes to the supernatural, this explanation means some people are miraculously restored and others are not.

Two sons were resuscitated, and most are not.....

Moreover, and this **is important**, those two sons, as with Lazarus,.... ended up dying,... at some point. Maybe it was a week later... or ... ten years later.

They died. Everyone dies, and there was grieving and sadness.

So, the real issue becomes.....how long is long enough to live?

Isn't that really at the heart of problem?????

Timing is the real issue/ the real concern.

Actually, when we contemplate our own timetable,... our struggle is really about finitude. We want to live..... as if we will live forever, and that thinking is ridiculous.

Yet, that is how we tend to think-- death is a distant abstract.

In addition, when determining death for others, we also have our own special rules.

Some people are Not allowed to die.

Children are not allowed to die.

Young parents are not allowed to die.

The same law applies for our partners, siblings, dear friends and parents,..... okay... maybe parents are allowed when they are real old and suffering.

Yet, that reasoning is not sound either.

Someone suffering from stage four Alzheimer's disease doesn't need to die. That person needs relief from the disease.

Likewise with the terminally ill in severe pain. They need restoration or relief from the pain. Do they really need death?

Life is precious. Each life is precious. Each breath is precious.

Each person has a unique voice, a unique print, a unique touch and smell, and each person's presence and love can Not be replicated.

When a person dies, so does the freshness of that voice, so does that person's own experience, history and memory.

When a person dies, his/her contribution to the world is gone.

Her pain, his empathy, her insight, his touch..... and the physical acts of love.....the hugs / the touch / the presence.....Gone, all Gone.

Life is precious.

Never hearing your name spoken by that person,.... no matter the age, is a sad loss.

Life is precious, especially when we know we all will die.

Sometimes,.. Amazing Grace is seeing / grasping what we dread the most, and choosing to live anyways. That can be a miracle.

Our children are precious; our partners are precious; our dear friends, our siblings, and our parents are precious.

Life is precious,.....and the truth is,..... we only have right now.

We only have today,... maybe that much.

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Yet,maybe that's not enough, and maybe grief, hardships and sorrow are too much..... and it's just NOT fair.

If that's the case, then we are prone to ask, "What Good is God?"

If God allows so much suffering and pain, then what good is God?

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What good is God?

What good is my partner?

What good is my child, my parents,.... my siblings,... my dear friends? What good is a flower?

What good is Love?

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The answer to that all depends on NOT what we want from life, but rather how we want to live.

God invests in living. How do we respond to God's gift of life?