

Celebration of Life – Genesis 23:1-2, 19-20

Before we look into our passage today, I want to read to you a poem that Joyce Raitt gave to me this week. Many of you may know that Joyce was a teacher and has a deep love for all children. She wants to see every child reach their potential and be taught the important lessons of life. Of course the greatest lesson is to know that we have a Heavenly Father who loves us so much that He gave us his one and only Son so that those who believe in him might have eternal life. Well, this poem is a powerful lesson about living life well by two very different people, who in the end were not all that different. The poem is simply called, "One, Two Three."

One, Two, Three

It was an old, old, old, old lady,
And a boy that was half-past three;
And the way that they played together
Was beautiful to see.

"You are up in Father's big bedroom,
In the chest with the queer old key!"
And she said: "You are *warm* and *warmer*;
But you are not quite right," said she.

She couldn't go running and jumping,
And the boy no more could he;
For he was a thin little fellow,
With a thin little twisted knee.

"It can't be in the little cupboard
Where Mother's things used to be –
So it must be the clothes-press, Grandma,"
And he found her with his Three.

They sat in the yellow sunlight,
Out under the maple tree;
And the game they played I'll tell you
Just as it was told to me.

Then she covered her face with her fingers,
That were wrinkled and white and wee,
And she guessed where the boy was hiding,
With a One and a Two and a Three.

It was Hide-And-Go-Seek they were playing,
Though you'd never have known it to be –
With an old, old, old, old lady
And a boy with a twisted knee.

And they never had stirred from their places
Right under the maple tree –
This old, old, old, old lady
And the boy with the lame little knee –
This dear, dear, dear old lady,
And the boy who was half-past three.

The boy would bend his face down
On his little sound right knee,
And he guessed where she was hiding
In guesses One, Two, Three.

"You are in the china closet!"
He would laugh and cry with glee –
It wasn't the china closet,
But he still had Two and Three.

The passage we read was about the death of Sarah, the wife of Abraham. What does this have to do with an old lady and a little boy playing hide-and-seek together?

The answer is simple: Life is a precious gift from God. We must live it well and celebrate the gift of life he has given us. In the poem we read how two very different individuals were making their lives full with love and happiness by sharing a game together. In our passage Abraham honours the life of his wife by making sure she has a proper ending: a place of burial and a place to point to and tell the next generation: "Remember her life."

Scripture tells us some beautiful things about our lives.

Our story starts with this amazing truth: God breathed His own life into us when he created us:

Read again Genesis 2:7:

And the LORD God formed man *of* the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

And did you read what God says after he created the first person?

So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

²⁸ God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

³¹ God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

But that was then. What about you and me? Does God still care about us? Hear again the wonderful words of Psalm 139:

¹³ For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
¹⁴ I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful,
I know that full well.
¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you
when I was made in the secret place,
when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.
¹⁶ Your eyes saw my unformed body;
all the days ordained for me were written in your book
before one of them came to be.

Do you hear what God is saying to us here? God takes the time to create each and every person, and from the moment our life begins in the womb of our mothers He is watching over

us and knows how long our journey on life will be. Friends, there is not one person on this planet who is an accident, a mistake or an unwanted child. Every person began life because God so ordained it and He has a purpose for your life. What is that purpose?

I have so many people come to me and ask, “What is the purpose of my life?” They usually want me to tell them about some life-changing ministry they can do that will change the world and make them feel complete and valuable. Usually they come to me when it is time for a career change!

I usually send them away frustrated, because I cannot give them an answer like that. The reason is this; our purpose is less about what we do, than who we become. God’s purpose for our lives is that we come to know Him, and love Him and serve Him in all we do – whether we are world changing businessmen or dish washing, toilet cleaning common folk. And to get to know God we must come to Him through Jesus...

“No man comes to the Father except through Jesus.. the Way, the Truth and the Life”
John 14:6

And God has a plan for each of our lives, but in the end that plan looks the same: that we might reflect the character and love and grace of Jesus to this world:

Romans 8:29 says:

For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.

This is our purpose – to become Christ like. This is holiness.

What a precious gift God has given to each of us, the gift of life. Never should we take it for granted, nor waste it on silly things. Never should we do things that bring harm to us or to others because each life is a gift from God. And if you do not think that this gift is precious – if you do not think you are very important or that you are not worth very much – remember once again, God gave Jesus, His son, His only son, whom he loved to die to rescue **you** from sin and Satan and bring you into his family. All the gold in the world, all the wealth in the universe could not buy the life of the Son of God, but he gave his life to redeem you – to buy you back from the empty life you were living without him.

You cannot get more valuable than that. If people around you say you are worthless and not valuable, walk away from them and join those who see you as Christ sees you: priceless!

I must take you to our passage to conclude...

Abraham buys a parcel of ground to bury his dear wife, Sarah, when she passes away at 127 years of age. This will be a place forever remembered, so that the memory of Sarah will live on. This simple act of providing a burial place to celebrate her life was honouring the life God gave to her. Her life was celebrated in this simple act of kindness.

Today when someone dies, we often hold a service called a celebration of life. This is so appropriate as we should celebrate the gift of life God gave. The funeral, or memorial or celebration of life often tells about the good things the individual did, but in the end, it should be a chance to say thank you to God for the life of that individual – whether they lived 1 week, or 100 years.

I hope I never hear any Christian say, “Don’t have a service for me – I don’t want it, or I don’t need it.”

This is so wrong on so many levels but let me give you two reasons:

1. Your family needs this. They need to grieve and share that grief together with family and friends. It helps the healing begin, so do not take it away. The dead don’t need a service: the living do. Don’t be selfish and say “I don’t want a service.” If it’s the money you are worried about, you can do a service for free – just call a pastor to come and pray with a small gathering of friends and family. It does not have to be elaborate – but it must happen.
2. The service is not about your life, but about the God who gave you life. Even though the celebration of life tells about the life of the deceased, the service is not complete if it does not point us to God who gave us life and Jesus who redeemed our life. That is the purpose of a celebration of life.

I know some may not agree, but you are allowed to be wrong! Life is a precious gift from God – every life – and every life matters and should be seen as precious and celebrated every day. That is what the old, old, old, old lady and the boy with the twisted knee were doing – celebrating life! Do it when you are alive. Every morning start with a simple prayer – “Thank God I am alive!” We will be in heaven soon enough – so live each day to its fullest.

And many of you know the pain of loss, the tears of grief – that is okay and good. Each time you feel the pains of loss you are celebrating their life. As you remember – even through tears – you honour the life God gave them – and that is a good thing.

Jesus said the purpose of our life is to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and all your strength, and love your neighbour as yourself.” (Lk 10:27)

This is your purpose. This is really living – loving God and loving others. I heard this week how someone picked up a friend and had lunch with them, knowing they needed encouragement. I heard how someone wept over a loved one unexpectedly in a department store. I heard how someone committed to help one of the “tough to love people” because they needed it, I heard how a group was formed to encourage new and old believers alike... and I knew God was pleased as he saw you celebrate – and honour – the life He had given you.

Abraham celebrated the life of his wife Sarah – while she was alive and even after she died. He honoured her by giving her a good burial. Abraham knew that life was a precious gift from God and it should be celebrated. May we also live with that awareness.

What will you do this week to celebrate the life God gave you????