

Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

"Dying is Worth Living For"

Old Testament Lesson

Ecclesiastes 7:1-14 (NRSV)

- ¹ A good name is better than precious ointment,
and the day of death, than the day of birth.
- ² It is better to go to the house of mourning
than to go to the house of feasting;
for this is the end of everyone,
and the living will lay it to heart.
- ³ Sorrow is better than laughter,
for by sadness of countenance the heart is made glad.
- ⁴ The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning;
but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.
- ⁵ It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise
than to hear the song of fools.
- ⁶ For like the crackling of thorns under a pot,
so is the laughter of fools; this also is vanity.
- ⁷ Surely oppression makes the wise foolish,
and a bribe corrupts the heart.
- ⁸ Better is the end of a thing than its beginning;
the patient in spirit are better than the proud in spirit.
- ⁹ Do not be quick to anger,
for anger lodges in the bosom of fools.
- ¹⁰ Do not say, "Why were the former days better than these?"
For it is not from wisdom that you ask this.
- ¹¹ Wisdom is as good as an inheritance,
an advantage to those who see the sun.
- ¹² For the protection of wisdom is like the protection of money,
and the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom gives life to the one who possesses it.
- ¹³ Consider the work of God;
who can make straight what he has made crooked?
- ¹⁴ In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider; God has made the one as well as the other, so that mortals may not find out anything that will come after them.

Bible/Sermon Focus

The book of Ecclesiastes is my favorite book in the Bible. It addresses the "unhappy obsession" that human have been given in seeking the meaning of life.

Our protagonist in the movie Soul is a man named Joe Gardner. He spends his days running from one moment to the next in search of the ultimate moment that is his reason for living. He believes this moment to be success as a jazz musician, playing gigs every night. Joe believes that if he reaches this goal, he will have "arrived," at fulfilling his purpose. That he will be happy. That he will have "made it." He even says, "I would die a happy man if I could perform with Dorothea Williams."

How many of us are guilty of doing this? We believe that if we just land the right job, or find the right relationship, or whatever it may be; that if we just had that one thing, everything else would be perfect. And in the process of running through life, we forget to live. We forget that the journey is our home.

Near the end of the film Joe does land that dream job, and plays music all night. After the set he's talking with Dorothea Williams and confesses, "I've been waiting for this day my entire life. I thought I'd feel different." Dorothea tells him a story:

"I heard this story about a fish, he swims up to an older fish and says: "I'm trying to find this thing they call the ocean." "The ocean?" the older fish says, "that's what you're in right now." "This", says the young fish, "this is water. What I want is the ocean!""

In the book of Ecclesiastics the teacher says that the very search for the meaning of life is *hevel*. *Hevel* is a Hebrew word that does not translate easily to English. It means steam or vapor, but it also means futility, meaningless, foolishness, nonsense, and absurdity. The *search* for the meaning of life is absurd. It is best...to just live. The *search* for the meaning will always leave you empty handed and unsatisfied, so just live. Ecclesiastics says it's best to just find meaningful work, or a lover, or good food and drink and company to keep, or to spend time worshipping God, because that's the best we've got.

And the thing that 22 understood that Joe didn't, is that the best we've got, this life thing, is pretty incredible just as it is. That lollipops and pizza taste good, and walking is wonderful. That joy can be found in the company of the every day people we meet and live with, from those we teach to those who cut our hair. The breeze in the air and the changing of the seasons are works of art in themselves. "Regular old living," just living life, is purpose enough. The meaning of life is to live it. And that's enough. Everything else is *hevel*.

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss Disney's "Soul" in relation to this week's sermon and scripture.
2. Share three simple pleasures you experienced today.
3. Why do you think the book of Ecclesiastes is in the Bible?
4. Reflect on this quote from Moonwind in Soul, "Lost souls are not that different from those in the zone. The zone is enjoyable but when that joy becomes an obsession it becomes disconnected from life."
5. Read and reflect on this section from the last chapter of Ecclesiastes 12:1-8.

Prayer

Holy God, we give you thanks for arms that hold, ears that listen and the laughter of community. Help us to slow down so that we can taste the food, smell the breeze and live in awe of this miraculous existence that you have given us. Amen.

"I grabbed a couple road lollis." -22