



**THE SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER
WHY WAIT?
MAY 24, 2020**

JOHN 17: 1-11

After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed:

“Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.

“I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me, and they have obeyed your word. Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. For I gave them the words you gave me, and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me. I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them. I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one.

SERMON

As I've gotten older, I read the obituaries daily. I'm always glad when I don't see my photo there.



Recently, a minister's obituary appeared stating that he had made a peaceful passage into eternal life.

I wonder how many of us think that this is how it works?

We live a life on earth. We die. And then we enter eternal life. Often, another step is inserted into this process: we live a life on earth. We die. And, if we have lived a good enough life, we then enter eternal life.

Inherent in this perspective is a merit game. And a merit game is an ego-driven game.

From a certain view, it makes sense that we can make this mistake.

The world is built on a merit system:

- Clean your plate and you can have some dessert.
- Do your homework and you can go out with your friends.
- Clean your room and you can play outside.
- Do excellent work at your job and you might get a raise.
- My father used to pay my sister and me \$1.00 for every "a" on our report card and 50 cents for every "b." Of course, nothing for "c" and below.

On the other hand:

- Act up at school and we get a detention.
- Go 65 in a 35 speed limit and we risk getting a ticket.
- Stay out all night and our spouse will not reward us.

We base most of life on a system of reward and punishment.



So, it's understandable that, without input from scripture or an experience with Jesus Christ, we would think that God works the same way as the world.

Simplistically, be good and go to heaven. Be bad and go to hell.

Adolescent thinking, along with dysfunctional thinking, sees the world in black and white. Particularly for Lutherans, we see life in various shades of gray. Lutheran teaching is about the middle path. Life is ambiguous and complex.

And the middle path cuts through the dualism of reward and punishment. Why?

Because Jesus comes from the unseen spiritual world where the merit system does not exist.

After Jesus is arrested and brought before Pilate, he is asked whether he is a king. He answers: "my kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here."

What may confuse us is that, depending on the gospel tradition, Jesus has two names for the kingdom from which he originates: the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven.

These happen to be Jesus' primary metaphors for the spiritual kingdom which he declares is now in our midst, now falling upon us, now even within us.

The kingdom of heaven is not about a far-off celestial heaven that we may enter at the end of our life if we are good enough.



In the fourth chapter of John, Jesus is clear that the kingdom encompasses eternal life and it begins now: “look around you, look at the fields; already they are ready for harvest! Already the reaper is being paid his wages, already he is bringing in the grain for eternal life, and thus the sower and reaper rejoice together.”

Jesus says “already” three times! Jesus reveals that the spiritual world is here and now among us. That the spiritual world offers eternal life now. That we can connect to the real and eternal in this lifetime. The old spiritual phrase is we are “in the world but not of the world.”

The path to eternal life involves surrender to whatever is in front of us in this moment, even when we do not like this moment.

Be present to Jesus and the kingdom offers us eternal life in our daily living....

One day a little fish overhears two older fish talking about water and that fish cannot live without water.

The little fish freaks out and begins searching all over for water, afraid that he will soon die. Finally, he gets up the nerve to ask another fish where he can find water.

The fish laughs and said, “you’re swimming in it.”

In the same way, we can spend our whole lives preparing for eternal life in the world to come without ever being aware that we are living in it now.

And the critical word is now.



Being in the “naked now,” as Richard Rohr calls it, leads some to call it “the sacrament of the present moment.” That being truly present to each moment in front of us can be a taste of the divine.

We are now swimming in the water of eternal life. But do we know it experientially?

Throughout John’s gospel, Jesus tells us that eternal life is now:

“whoever believes in the son has eternal life.”

“whoever drinks of the water I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water I will give him will become a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

“truly, truly I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes who has sent me has eternal life.”

“I am the living bread come down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever.”

“I give them eternal life and they will never perish and no one will snatch them out of my hand.”

The words of Jesus are a revelation. Because he reveals to us that the spiritual world plays by different rules. And we do not come to know this without spiritual revelation.

Eternal life, freely given, offered to anyone who is open to the kingdom of God in his or her midst.



This is why Luther asserts that our salvation is taken care of—forget the merit system. Now, how do you want to live?

Further, Duns Scotus, a Franciscan teacher, urges us to be present to the “this-ness” of each thing. Do not think of categories: women or men or birds or flowers or water.

Be fully present to this woman as she speaks with you.

See the beauty in the hawk sitting on your fence.

Take in the “this-ness” of this one rose bush.

Really listen to a song, rather than it being background music.

There is such joy in being fully present to one song the band plays. I can completely lose myself in being present to this song.

And isn't that the point? To drop the ego and just be present. Experience fully what is in front of you.

“the here-and-now has the power to become the gateway and the breakthrough point to the universal. The concrete, the specific, the physical, the here-and-now--when we can be present to it in all its ordinariness—becomes the gateway to the eternal.” (Richard Rohr)

For me, Carl Jung is the most spiritually soulful man I know.

Without necessarily using the term “eternal life,” he points to eternal life in so much of his writing.

Here is a taste:



As far as we can discern, the sole purpose of human existence is to kindle a light of meaning in the darkness of mere being.

The privilege of a lifetime is to become who you truly are. Every human life contains a potential, if that potential is not fulfilled, then that life is wasted. Our sins and errors and mistakes are necessary to us, otherwise we are deprived of the most precious incentives to development.

Faith, hope, love, and insight are the highest achievements of human effort, they are found and given by experience.

We cannot stand a meaningless life. The least of things with a meaning is worth more in life than the greatest of things.

The decisive question is: are we related to something infinite or not? That is the telling question of life. Only if we know that the things which truly matter is the infinite can we avoid fixing our interests on utilities and upon all kinds of goals which are not of real importance. If we understand and feel that here in this life we already have a link to the infinite, desires and attitudes change.

Life has always seemed to me like a plant that lives on its underground stem. Its true life is invisible, hidden in the underground stem. The part that appears above ground lasts only a single summer. Then it withers away. Yet I have never lost a sense of something that lives and endures underneath the eternal flux. What we see is the blossom, which passes. The underground stem remains.

Connecting back to scripture, Paul writes in Romans: "I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things



to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.”

Let us deliver ourselves up to the great current of God’s love in Jesus Christ. The great current of eternal life which Jesus offers now.

Why wait?

SERMON SONG

DADDY DOESN’T PRAY ANY MORE (CHRIS STAPLETON)