



Summer Preaching Series: Questions of Faith

***How Can I Make the Most
Out of My Life?***



A Sermon By
The Rev. Andrew W. Walter

August 20, 2017
Grace Episcopal Church
Silver Spring, Maryland

An audio version of this sermon may be found on the Grace Church website at
<http://graceepiscopalchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/2017-08-20-AWW.mp3>.

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How Can I Make the Most Out of My Life?

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The Eleventh Sunday After Pentecost
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This past spring, our youngest son, Timothy, graduated from college, and, like his two brothers before him, Timothy has struggled with the transition. Luckily, he was able to find a job, because that's not easy for young people these days, but after twenty years of school, twenty years of the same routine – class, homework, sports, friends, fraternity parties – facing real life is hard. The future is like a big black hole to Timothy. It is all a big unknown, and he can't see where he's going. He's not sure if the current job is right for him. He doesn't have any sense of a career path. He doesn't know where he wants to live, where he wants to work. "What I am going to do with my life?" is a question he often asks.

Timothy is not alone in feeling this way. We all wonder what to do with our lives. Even as we get older it's a question we continue to ask, though, we might rephrase it into something deeper and more spiritual, like today's question from our summer preaching series: how can I make the most out of my life?

I am not going to stand here and pretend to have answers to those questions, because I don't have life all figured out myself, but I can share some of the lessons I have learned from my own journey, lessons I have passed on to Timothy and his brothers. There are five I want to offer this morning, and then, afterwards, I would love to hear from all of you, the insights you've gleaned along the way, the lessons you would pass on to others, the way you would answer these big, important questions about life.

So, here we go:

First, we all have to find our vocation.

"Vocation" comes from a Latin word meaning "to call," and it refers to the work we are called to do by God¹. All of us have gifts and strengths, which God intends for us to use, but we are the only ones who can figure out how. Discerning our vocation isn't always easy; it can take time, and there might be some missteps and wrong choices; and, our vocation might change over time.

As many of you know, before ordination, I worked in finance for many years, because that is what I always wanted to do, what I always thought I would do, but slowly, I learned I didn't aptitude for it. Then, as part of the ordination process, I had to take a personality test, and, when the results came back, the number one career path for people with my personality was: clergy or religious leader. The number one career path to avoid: business or finance. But, it took me years, almost a decade, to figure that out.

How do you know if you've found your vocation? Well, if you are really excited with the way you are spending your days, if you can't wait to get out of bed in the morning and get back to it, then you probably have found your vocation, but, if you dread what you are doing, if each day is a chore, if you feel bored, or restless, or unhappy, then you probably haven't. And, you need to keep searching.

¹Frederic Buechner

Second, we have to develop a healthy relationship with money.

Jesus said you cannot serve God and wealth², because Jesus knew the power that money can have. Money makes us anxious and tense. We worry about having enough to pay for college, for retirement, for healthcare. It causes stress and strain in relationships, as couples argue over spending their money, and saving their money and finding the right balance.

Many of us believe all of our problems would go away, if only we had some more money. But, I have known some wealthy people who are very unhappy, and, I have known some people who have very little in the way of money, but have all the happiness in the world. It is not how much money you have that is important. It is being happy with what you have.

Third, give your heart to someone else.

This may be the most important point of all, because, if we are searching for the meaning of life, how to get the most out of life, then the answer probably begins, and, the answer probably ends with love.

Each and every one of us was created out of love. We yearn for love. We all have so much love to give. When we give our heart to someone else, we open ourselves up to being seen, and heard, and accepted for who we are. There is nothing like the power of love, to change our lives, to change our world, and that's why love is such a big part of the Bible. The Bible is a love story:

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, than to lay down one's life for one's friends.

Love is really what life is all about, and, if you give your love someone else, love will find you in return.

Fourth, enjoy the small moments.

Most of us spend our days running around, just trying to stay on top of everything. Before we know it, days turn into weeks, weeks turn into months, months turn into years. It is hard for me to believe that the Grace Church youth, who were barely into middle school when I arrived six years ago, are now going off to college, and the babies I baptized the first few years here are now running around like crazy.

But, that's how fast time flies, which is why we have to drink it all in, particularly those small moments: watching the sunrise or sunset; catching the eclipse; hiking in the mountains; walking on the beach; seeing LeBron play basketball; Bryce Harper play baseball; having dinner with those people we love.

As many of you know, a few weeks ago, my wife, Susan, and I spent several days driving the California coast. It's something we wanted to do for years, but we kept putting it off and it putting off, until finally, we looked at each other and asked, "Why are we putting it off?" And, I'm so glad we went, because it was amazing.

Finally, we should all do something for someone else.

I saved this point for last, because, over the last week, I've been reminded how important it is. With the events in Charlottesville, VA, we have once again witnessed the prejudice, bigotry and hatred some people have for people of color and people of different faiths. I can't believe in this day and age we are still talking about neo-Nazi's and white supremacists, and that some political leaders in this country still

²Matthew 6:24; Luke 16:13

talking about neo-Nazi's and white supremacists, and that some political leaders in this country could possibly equivocate in condemning them. If history has shown us anything, it is these people are on the wrong side of history, morally and spiritually. What they stand for is contrary to the highest aspirations of this county, and, more importantly for those of us here this morning, is contrary to the way of Jesus.

Jesus embraced everyone with mercy, compassion and understanding. He welcomed those who were different; he ate with outcasts and sinners; he cared for the poor, the sick, and the marginalized. And, the greatest movements in history, the greatest men and women in history, followed the same path, lifting up their fellow human beings by pursuing truth, and justice, and equality for all people. If you want to know what to do with your life, do what they did – do something for someone else, something that will help, something that will lift them up, something that will make their lives better. As one of my heroes, Jackie Robinson once said, "A life is not important except in the impact it has on other lives," and, if anyone knew about making an impact, it was Jackie Robinson. If you want to make the most out of your life, help someone else get the most out of their life.

Amen.