

“Grasping Our Purpose”

Living The Good Life Lenten Series #1

Psalm 37:1-7 & John 17:1-5

March 9, 2014 ~ Rev. Jo Ramsey



Who among us is ready for a taste of the The Good Life? That looks pretty good doesn't it? Maybe you're already living the good life. What would it look like? Where are you? What are you doing? What do you have? Who are you with?

Our ideas and notions of 'living the good life' are just as personal as our favorite foods and the things we like to do in our spare

time. Chances are your definition of the 'good life' might involve a big truck or a big boat or a big house or a big tv or a big stack of books to read. If you're like most people, it involves having enough, maybe even a whole lot, of money, time, health and leisure.

In case you missed it, we celebrated Ash Wednesday this past week. It marks the beginning of the 40 days of Lent. This Lenten season at East Union, we're thinking together about living the

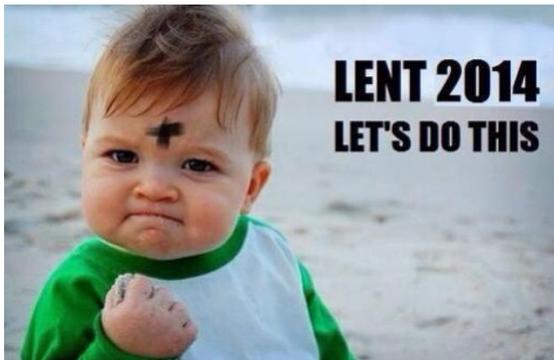


good life. But we aren't

focusing on that good life you imagined a few moments ago. We're going to explore the good life as in the **Good News** life, the **Gospel** life, life transformed by God's love and truth and grace. For Jesus came that we might have life and have it abundantly!

We start our Lenten journey with the

matter of our purpose. So, I have another question for you to ponder. What's your purpose? What is your life about? Who are you? What difference do you make? Perhaps you think immediately of your job, or school or family, how you earn a living, who you take care of. Or maybe you think of some project you're working on – a song you're writing, a scrapbook or quilt you're making, the reality you are designing on



Minecraft, the levels you're unlocking and missions you're completing on Black Ops. I know some of you will think of the volunteering you do with here at church or in our community – coaching, delivering meals, filling backpacks. Of course, the world tells us the purpose of life is making money, having as much fun as possible, being popular. There's nothing wrong with these things, but if they define you and fill your life, you'll find yourself empty. It's kind of like cotton candy – all taste, but no substance.



It seems that a lot of people we know and care about are struggling with that empty



feeling...young, old, youth and middle-aged. Yes, the weather's been dreary, but it's more than that. For some, it's loneliness, conflict or sheer boredom. For others, it's because life is changing. Something that has given meaning and purpose – the stuff that defines us and around which we build our lives -- a job, a relationship, taking care of someone – has come to an end. For some young people, life hasn't really started, yet with all of its problems, it doesn't seem to hold much promise.

Many folks have no idea what their purpose is. It's like the little girl who was helping her mom prepare dinner. "Mommy," she asked, "why do you cut the ends off the roast before you cook it?" The mother thought for a moment and said "I think it's because it adds to the flavor by allowing the meat to better absorb the spices, but maybe



you should go ask your grandmother, because she always did it that way." So the little girl went to her grandmother and asked, "Grandma, why do you and Mom cut the ends off the roast before you cook it?" Her grandmother thought for a moment and said "I think it allows the meat to stay tender because it soaks up the juices better, but why don't you ask your Nana, because I learned it from her and she always did it that way." The little girl, went to her great grandmother, and asked her

“Nana, why do you and Mom and Grandma cut the ends off the meat before you cook it?” Her great grandmother smiled and said “I’m not sure why they do it, but I did it because my pot wasn’t big enough.”

We are all driven--either by default or design. Most of us muddle along without much thought, living according to the demands of our schedule, the expectations of others or the way our parents did. Like a pinball in a pinball machine, we’re batted around between the circumstances and people in our lives. We don’t really know why we do things, but we keep on keepin’ on, until we discover it isn’t enough. We yearn for something more, something deeper, something real. We yearn to grasp our purpose. ...

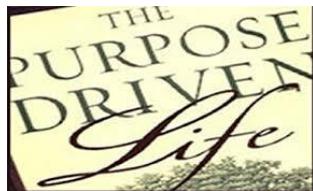


The search for the purpose of life has puzzled people for thousands of years. That's because we typically begin at the wrong starting point - ourselves. We ask What do I want to be? What should I do with my life? What are my goals, my ambitions, my dreams for my future? Your purpose starts with you, your desires and dreams. So, head to the self-help section of a bookstore. We fill out an online questionnaire to discover our passion and potential. We listen to motivational speakers who tell us to clarify our values, set goals, think positively, take risks, aim high.



Trouble is, we can do all of that and still be empty, frustrated and lost.

Rick Warren, the author of *The Purpose Driven Life*, explains why. He writes, “You are starting in the wrong place. It's not about you. The purpose of your life is far greater than your own personal fulfillment, your peace of mind, or even your happiness. It's far greater than your family, your career, or even your wildest dreams and ambitions. If you want to know why you were placed on this planet, you must



begin with God. You were born by his purpose and for his purpose.” Warren suggests that life is about letting God use you for his purposes, not you using him for your purposes.



This Lent, I want you to wake up every day and think, God created me for a purpose. God has a plan and wants to partner with me in the design of my life.

Colossians 1:16 says God created all things and all things find their purpose in him. God wants to lead us into His future filled with hope.

Rick Warren suggests there are two ways to discover the purpose for which you were created. Speculation, that is, guessing and Revelation or asking God. God has a plan for us. He doesn't just ask people to dream up what they want to do for Him. God's call begins with God's plan. Look at the Bible and you'll find a pattern: First, God reveals his plans and then asks particular people to help him accomplish his purposes. Think about it – God told Abram he planned to create a new nation, and then called him to be the father of this new nation. God told Moses he planned to free the Egyptian people, and then called him to lead them. God told Mary he planned to send his son to earth, and then he called her to be his mother. God has plans and purposes for each of us, but we must claim them and take



responsibility for ourselves. He doesn't just foist that plan and purpose on us.

Now, we tend to want specific, distinct guidance when we ask God to make the way clear. Sometimes, that happens. God puts it on our heart or uses circumstances or the advice of a loved one in concrete, specific ways. Go, and do this. Pursue this career. Live in this way.

But, more often, God's path and will for our life is more general and less obvious. Jesus put it simply as he prays for his disciples, "Give them life, real and eternal, that they would know God." That is our purpose. Our creeds teach us this too: The chief end and purpose of life is to know God and enjoy him forever. All else is secondary.

Rick Warren puts it this way: God created us with five reasons in mind. Our first purpose is to offer real worship. Our second purpose is to enjoy real relationships. Our third purpose is to learn real discipleship. Our fourth purpose is to practice real ministry. Our fifth purpose is to live out real evangelism. I'd put it this way – To Praise, Love, Follow, Serve, Share – These are God's purposes for our life.



This morning we celebrate the life of someone who truly lived a life of purpose, who lived the good life -- Jen Loper. Jen fought an 8 year battle with breast cancer and she died from it at age 40. But, breast

cancer didn't claim her life. She wasn't defined by it. In fact, if you didn't know Jen had cancer, you wouldn't guess it. She was too busy living with purpose -- enjoying God, loving her family and friends, following Jesus, serving others and sharing hope. Even in the dark times, Jen didn't spend a lot of time trying to figure out why God allowed her suffering. She embodied Thessalonians 5: "Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." Jen understood the passage does not ask us to



give thanks for all circumstances, nor does it say all circumstances are the will of God. It says our rejoicing and praying and giving thanks are the will of God. Jen realized the purpose of her life wasn't about the way it would end. It was about the way it was lived.

Sometimes, God's purposes are not about the particular end or a desired goal. More than a hundred years ago, Oswald Chambers wrote, "We tend to think that if

Jesus Christ compels us to do something or we are obedient to Him, He will lead us to great success. We should never think that our dreams of success are God's purpose for us. The question of whether or not we arrive at a particular goal is of little importance. God's purpose is for this very minute, not for sometime in the future. We must depend on Him and on His power *now*. If we can stay calm and faithful, while in the middle of the storms of life,



the purpose of God is being accomplished in us. What God desires for me is that I see him walking on the sea, with no shore, no success, nor goal is in sight, with absolute certainty that everything is alright. God's purpose is that I understand that Jesus can walk on the storms of my life right now.



So, as you consider your purpose this Lent, remember that Jesus walks with you, comforting you and leading you forward. You were created for reason. You

are not an accident. God loves you and has a purpose for your life. God may have something specific and exciting for you to do. But there's a good chance that your path and God's plan may not be that particularly clear or grand. But, it doesn't matter. As Mother Teresa says, "Not all of us can do great things, but we can do small things with great love." So, praise God, love one another, follow Jesus, serve with gladness and share the Good News, in big and little ways. For even now, God's purposes are being accomplished in you. You are already on the road to 'living the good life!'



In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.