

**“One Life to Live”**  
**Mathew 10: 24-39**  
**June 22, 2008**

A couple of years ago I was sitting in my office with a very nice guy planning for his mother's funeral. Somewhere in the midst of picking out scriptures and hymns and such, he came out with a sentence that gave me pause. Talking about what he might want done at his funeral, he said, *“If I die some day...”* As soon as those words were out of his mouth, I interrupted him and said, *“Wait, wait, wait, hold on just a second, let me clear something up for you. You just said, “If I die someday.” Let me help you out here, I'm sorry to be the one to break this to you, but you WILL die someday.”* We both laughed at this obviously human moment of denied humanity.

We all, at different times and places in life try to trick ourselves into believing that this life will go on forever. And if we aren't thinking that we have an unlimited number of days on earth, then we try to convince ourselves that there is more than one turn per customer.

I've told Nancy many times about a crazy tendency that I have to go through different times and events in life and think, *“Now when this happens again, I'm going to do it differently.”* The conversation in my confused brain goes something like this, *“The next time I'm in High School, I'm going to work harder to get good grades, or the next time that I have a first dance with a pretty girl at the 9<sup>th</sup> grade prom, I'm going to be careful not to accidentally chew gum into her hair.”* (Yes, I really did do that.) In my unconscious mind, it's almost as if there is a part of me that wants to believe that life can be lived like a TV sitcom in summer re-runs where you actually get to change the script the second time around and make things work out the way you would have wanted them in the first place. Sort of like the movie Groundhog Day in which Bill Murray finds himself living the same day of his life over and over and over again, finally getting it right after many, many tries, my imagination wants to believe that there are do over's in life, and that if you don't get it right the first time, then you can make it right the second time around.

But as we all know, there is no second time around. Life is a one way trip, and there is but one ticket per customer. We all have one life to live and that realization makes it so imperative that we make the most of every day, every

hour and every moment of this precious life that God has given to us.

Despite the fact that we spend so much of our lives trying to deny this reality, there are certain times, places and experiences in life that remind us of this fact, and bring to us a certain amount of clarity and a sometimes not so subtle reminder about the precious nature of human life.

The recent movie *“The Bucket List”* tells the story of two men who had just such an experience. In the film, these two men played by Jack Nicholson and Morgan Freeman meet in the hospital where they are each being treated for a terminal disease. In response to the certainty of their imminent demise, the two men create a “Bucket list” of all the things that they want to do in life before they kick the bucket. Then they set off on an around the world journey in pursuit of all the things that they want to do before they die.

Whether we realize it or not, we all write our own little bucket list every single day of our lives. We get up in the morning, put our feet on the floor, and then we go out the door to live our life, engaging in a series of things that we have chosen to do. And while we may occasionally use words like “have” or “must,” there is really nothing in life that we have to do. We might say that we “have” to go to work, but the truth is, that we could just as easily stay in bed and watch old movies on TV, if we choose to. And we might say that we have to pay our taxes, but no one is going to come and write out that check and put it in the mailbox for you. Not to say that there wouldn’t be certain not so pleasant ramifications of making these sorts of decision, the bottom line is that there is really nothing that we have to do.

So ultimately, the living of our lives all comes down to a matter of making decisions of what we are going to do, based on the priorities that we set for ourselves. Will I go to work, or lay in bed and watch old movies on AMC? Will I put in some overtime, or will I go home and play with the kids? Will I order a salad, or have the double cheeseburger platter? Will I go to church or the golf course? Every moment of the time that we spend on this earth is directed by the decisions that we make. We know that we can’t do everything, so we have ask ourselves what we **are** going to do. Every week has 7 days, each day has 24 hours and every hour has 60 minutes, and so ultimately we have to perform triage on our schedules and decide what is important and what is not. And the guidelines that we use for making these decisions are set by the priorities that we choose for our lives.

But how do we set these priorities? Where do we look for a guide that will help us choose that which we will value and that which we will not? For most of us who call ourselves Christian, we look first to the life and teaching of Jesus to find such a guide. But when we look at this morning's scripture lesson, we find some rather befuddling suggestions in Jesus' words.

First in (v. 34-36) Jesus said, *"Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law--a man's enemies will be the members of his own household."* An interesting statement coming from the guy who said that we should turn the other cheek, don't you think?

Then in (v. 37) he follows that up with, *"Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."* I might be missing something, but wasn't one of the 10 commandments, *"Thou shalt honor thy mother and thy father?"*

Then Jesus completes this little trifecta of confusion by saying in (v. 38-39) *"Anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."* How in the world can it be that losing one's life is the means to finding it?

Like so many of Jesus' words, these teachings from Matthew's gospel confuse and confound us at first glance. But when looked at with eyes that see, and heard with ears that hear, we discover a connecting thread that runs throughout Jesus' words that drives us toward a singular lesson that is both profound and true.

And the truth that we find in this crazy confounding passage from Matthew is this. Nothing and no one should be more important in one's life than Jesus Christ, and one's relationship with him. When he speaks of dividing a man from his father and a daughter from her mother, Jesus is challenging us to examine our loyalties, and check to make certain that we would betray neither him, nor our faith to or for anyone or anything.

When he talks about not loving one's parents or children more than him, he is saying that our ultimate love must be for him and so the loves of our life

must reflect that first love.

And finally, when he says that “anyone who does not take up his cross and follow him is not worthy”, he is warning us all that there is a price paid for the living of a quality life that shows loyalty and love for Jesus.

If we are loyal to nothing more than the living of a Christian life, if we love no one more than Jesus and show that love by the way that we treat others, then there will be a cross to carry and a price to pay. This is the sacrificing of lesser things for greater things. It is the giving up of what I want for what God calls me to. It is the decision to go to church instead of the golf course. It is the desire to focus on giving love rather than receiving it. It is the certainty that generosity produces a wealth that can't be calculated in dollars and cents. It is the conviction that nothing is more important than one's relationship with Christ.

We all have but one life to live, and if we live the remainder of our days on this earth, however many we might have, with dedication to Jesus and his teaching as the priority that guides those momentary decisions that make up the events of our lives, then we will find a joy, peace and happiness beyond measure. And the legacy that we leave behind will remain for generations to come.

Amen.