

Congregational Church of the Messiah

Pentecost Sunday – Mother's Day Sunday
May 11, 2008

“One Life to Live”

Acts 2:1-14, 36

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Each of us was given life without asking God or our parents or anyone for it. The mystery in our creation resides in the potential from which we have grown, what we have learned and used and those unused qualities and abilities, which remain dormant within us.

Did you ever wonder if perhaps God chose to leave something unfinished and not yet created in us? If you think about it, everything has the capacity to change and to grow. Everything is constantly in the process of emerging. When you really think about it, nothing is completed for all time, but everything is temporary and always in a state of flux.

The kind of life we create is largely influenced by the choices we make, the way in which we put the potential inside us into form and action, how we develop those abilities already within us, even if we are unaware of them.

In other words, the life we have to live, no matter what our age or past achievements may be, is still unfinished. There is still a mystery about what more our life will include. How our life will unfold in the days, months, years that lie ahead of us is still unknown to us.

Using the image of two towers, one representing you and one representing me, Karl Olsen creates a picture of how we often see ourselves and others, how our life is lived and how it relates to other lives.

In each of our lives, there are common needs, limitations, feelings, history and hopes. We share different expressions of these with all other human beings.

We also each have our own identity, unique and distinctly different in some or many aspects from other persons. We look different; we have different personalities.

Part of this individualism is in the innate characteristics, talents and abilities that we were given at birth. Through choices of our parents, then on our own, we trained ourselves to use certain of those talents, and they became skills. When the time came, some of these became our jobs, and our identity became tied up with the roles and tasks we now perform in society. This progressive refinement of God-given talents led to whatever status, lack thereof that we find ourselves in, or aspire to in our particular area or cultural setting.

One Life to Live

A few individuals in every generation rise to preeminence. They stand out as Nobel Prize winners or famous persons who have excelled in whatever particular field to which they have devoted their lives.

If a person looks up to another person across the courtyard to the other twin tower and sees the other person several levels above him or her, there is the potential of pedestalling the higher person. While in reverse, if one feels far superior and higher than someone in another tower, there is the potential of looking down on or patronizing the other person who is seen as on a lower level.

Realizing we are all created with unique but different talents and abilities, and that society seems to want to restrict who we think we are to certain quantifiable categories (consumer, client, patient, unit, social security number) we each still have only one life to live.

Creativity was in the past. Creativity takes place in the present and will in the future. God is still at work creating new surprises every day.

The disciples wondered about the meaning of the sayings and teachings of Jesus when they happened. New experiences helped them to understand the real meaning of what Jesus had said and done.

After the Resurrection, the disciples finally understood what the Prophets in the Old Testament were saying about the Messiah. At Pentecost, as we read in Acts, chapter 2, the disciples and all those in the upper room with them, personally experienced the coming of the Holy Spirit of God filling their minds and hearts. Never before had there been such an experience of God revealing Himself to many people in such a unique way.

With love and spiritual power, God's Holy Spirit came upon men and women in that upper room and changed their lives. That life-changing moment surprised everyone. God had never done that before. God was doing a new thing upon the earth, and it was the coming of God's own Spirit and filling up the spirit He had placed in the heart of human beings with the free will to decide how to use the spark of the divine within their human bodies.

We are unfinished beings until we choose to have our spirit in direct connection with God's Holy Spirit. God took the initiative in our creation to put the spark there, then, at Pentecost, to come and fill every person with His Holy Spirit.

Wherever we are, God's Spirit is within us. God's Spirit is with us now. Where two or three are gathered in His Name and spirit, there He will be also. (Matthew 18:20) And "Lo I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:20). We become aware of God's Spirit within us when we become conscious of God's Presence within us.

One Life to Live

John Wesley, founder of the Methodist Church, expressed his personal experience of God this way, “My heart was strangely warmed within.” And then he said, “If your heart is as my heart, give me your hand.” No further proof was needed that each person knew the spirit of God. No theological statement of faith or confession of sins was required for that initial bonding of soul to soul in Christ’s Spirit.

We each are created by God but not given perfection, yet a desire for it, a desire to be in right relationship with our Creator. With one life to live, our choices have consequences that often have major impacts on how we live the one life we have been given.

There are different times in our lives: a time to acquire things, and a time to let go of things. For everything, there is a season. (Ecclesiastics 3:1a, 3:6c, d)

At one time, I enjoyed going to estate sales. Several pieces of furniture found a new home in our house. In Toledo one day, there was an old trunk sitting on the curbside just a few houses down from the house Eldyne and I were renting. The trunk had a thick coat of black paint on it but still had the leather handles in fairly good condition.

I went up to the door and asked the occupants if they really intended to get rid of the trunk. When they said, “Yes, you may have it,” I joyfully lifted the old, discarded trunk into the back of the car and took it up the block to our driveway. Applying paint remover liberally, I scrapped and stripped the black paint away from nearly every hinge and corner and uncovered a solid steamer trunk from Chicago Trunk Works 1894. It was our first coffee table and is still serving as storage nearly 40 years later.

Looking back, I learned the excitement of acquiring. Now I am working on enjoying the relief of letting go of unnecessary possessions accumulated through the years.

However, things that come into our lives are different from what God places in our lives and grow into who we are at this point in our lives. Olsen’s towers of relationships are often rather lonely places when we stay in our own towers. We work, live and choose to limit our reaching out to what is comfortable within our own confines.

Karl Olsen suggests that there is a wonderful patio open to the skies between the twin towers where we can mingle with others, where we can learn, share, laugh and continue to grow in our faith as well as in who God created us to be.

One of the differences is that God is still able to take the initiative and surprise individuals. This revealing of latent or new capacities especially happens when we move out of our tower and are willing to meet other people on the patio where life is constantly evolving.

Often mothers are the ones in a family who are “out there” getting acquainted with other people in the community. Mothers seem to have a knack for doing a hundred things at the

One Life to Live

same time and being organized in spite of the many divergent demands on their time.

Therefore, we honor mothers on this Sunday and recognize the introduction to life, which we learned from them as they opened doors and windows to life and encouraged us to prepare for the rest of life.

We also acknowledge God's initiative of coming into the world by creating a new personal relationship with those who believed in Jesus Christ but had not had a personal experience of the Holy Spirit of God in their lives.

Being conscious of God's Presence within us makes it possible for us to ask and receive God's guidance in our lives. God calls each of us to respond and follow Him with whatever talents, and abilities and interests we have. What we can do, with God's help, we need to do for God's sake and for our own soul.

We have freely received from the Lord in all His grace and love.
Let us freely share God's amazing love and grace for us.

We here at Messiah have the privilege and responsibility to build the bridges over which others will be drawn closer to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. We cannot change everything about the world that needs changing. We can change some things, and God can lead us to discover and influence those things that God needs us to do where we are.

Amen.