

Celebrate Life! (Sermon)
Sermon (FCC)
July 2, 2017

Greetings

This is the day that the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it!¹

Thank you to our senior pastor Chuck Blaisdell for again affording me the opportunity to bring the message on this Sunday morning. Also to the congregation here at First Christian Church Colorado Springs, as well as my dear friends and family who are present. **Special thanks to my beautiful wife Shari**, who in every endeavor, has always been perpetually by my side and by the way, today she is celebrating her birthday. **Above all else I give thanks** to the God of all creation for allowing me another day on what has already been a marvelous life journey.

Introduction

As I was meditating on what I would present, I begin to realize that my sermon this morning titled "Celebrate Life" fits in with pastor Chuck's sermon series: "Summer Road Trip Through the Psalms". **For those of us who** have ever taken a road trip, we know that the journey in and of itself is often a celebration. But just what does it mean to celebrate life and why should we be predisposed to do so?

Definition

This has been quite a busy and life changing first six months of the year for me. Attaining the position of airline captain and graduating from seminary with a Master's of Divinity degree are absolutely reasons to celebrate life. **However, celebration is not confined** to these particular personal accomplishments, but can be found in almost anything we do. For instance in just two days we will celebrate the Declaration of Independence and founding of our country. **Where the Declaration's very words:** "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." Are words that are indeed celebratory of life.

In celebrating life, a question to ask is: "Just what does God have to say about how we are to live a celebratory life?" **The writers of Ecclesiastes state:** "I know that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to do good while they live. That each of them may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all their toil - this is the gift of God." **And in First Corinthians** the Apostle Paul declares: "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God."

Lets take a look at some examples that we are all familiar with. A baby shower celebrates life while still in the womb, and once birthed into the world is celebrated each birthday, placing special emphasis on the 16th, 21st, 50th and 100th year of life. **Kindergarten, elementary school, middle school, high school, and college graduations** are always occasions to celebrate the God driven momentum of one's life journey. And then of course

¹ Psalm 118:24

there are the bridal showers, bachelor parties and bachelorette parties preceding a wedding where after the ceremony some receptions have been known to continue into the wee hours of the morning and even for days in some cultures.

Collectively we celebrate the religious holidays Christmas and Easter. National holidays like Martin Luther King Jr., Day, July Fourth and Thanksgiving. **We also celebrate** holidays that spread across borders, such as Valentines Day, Saint Patrick's Day, and New Years Day. **Some even argue** that our grandest national celebration is Super Bowl Sunday! **Then there are the celebrations** that tend to be a little less known as they relate to particular cultural and ethnic groups where for example in the African American community some celebrate the Kwanza holiday, Watch Night which dates back to December 31st 1862 and Juneteenth where on June 19th 1865 two and a half years after the first Watch Night, Union soldiers entered Texas with word that Confederate General Robert E. Lee, had surrendered thus freeing the last of our brothers and sisters who were being held in the bondage of American slavery.

Depth

Now I cannot in good conscience go any further in my presentation of celebrating life without explaining a bit of why I celebrate life. As previously mentioned I became a captain at my airline flying one of the most technologically advanced airplanes in the world and after five years I also graduated seminary with a Master's of Divinity Degree. **While these are certainly** worthy reasons to celebrate the life God has blessed me with, they are not the central focus of my celebration.

Ten years ago I was diagnosed with a then rare form of leukemia and for seven and a half years I was in a watch and wait status. Finally, on October 20th 2014 after I was grounded and could no longer fly due to the progression of the cancer, I started chemotherapy, which lasted until Christmas week of 2014. After which for the next two years I was in a maintenance program for the disease. **Twelve years earlier** my mother had passed away after herself living with leukemia. Now I know that many of you under my voice today, in one way or another, have been touched by cancer, be it through personal experience, or that of a family member or friend.

Here is a small window into what it looks like to really celebrate life. Above all, God is always there and assures us that "unaccompanied," we never have to go through life and the challenges it brings. **One of and I argue** the most important way in which God is present with us, is through other people. **From day one** my wife Shari has been with me enduring all of the pain and anxiety of this ordeal. She was with me every second of my chemotherapy infusions, as well as during the two year bi-monthly treatments that were to follow. **I'll spare you the details** of some of the tasks she lovingly and without ever complaining performed. Surely God was and still is working through Shari to ensure that no matter how many days might be left, that we will celebrate life and celebrate it together. **You see what looks to be great accomplishments** worthy of celebration, mean absolutely nothing unless we do it all for the glory of God and Shari is my Godsend.

Where does that leave us today? We must ask ourselves if those around us, near or far, are equally able to celebrate life? Are we allowing God to work through us in order to bring celebration into someone else's life? Where might we find those opportunities to bring celebration into someone's life, at least metaphorically in the same way that Jesus did when he at the insistence of his mother, at a wedding banquet turned water into wine?

Examine Beliefs

Lets not fool ourselves or choose to live under the delusion that those who cry out for fair housing and a place to live are able to celebrate life in a way that God intends. **We should not mistake** the cries of a mother attempting to feed a hungry child who can cry no more, as celebrative shouts. **There is no celebration** of life in the words of leadership that announce the poor have no place in the governance of themselves, which by the way is in direct opposition to the powerful words written in our Declaration of Independence. **Are we really celebrating life when** there are those bent on creating legislation preventing the persecuted from crossing borders to where a somewhat safe haven can be found? Perhaps they should familiarize themselves with the stories of the borders that Israel's children had to cross on their frightful journey out of captivity. Or is it acceptable to use government agencies to separate families and deport those who have served and known only this country as their home? And no, life is not celebrated when we no longer see the value in creating and supporting a healthcare system that at a reasonable cost serves all who are in need.

“What is it that you believe about celebrating life?” “Is your celebration of life really a celebration if there is an unbearable cost to your neighbor, seen or unseen?” Are we able to celebrate life when our elderly relative or neighbor cannot afford their prescription drugs? **Is life celebrated when young** adults are saddled with debt after graduating college, with the realization that it will take them at least half their adult life to pay off? Can you say that you are celebrating life when the right for a woman to care for herself as she sees fit, is taken out of her hands and after the mysteriously wonderful gift of life that comes with birth, the mother is demonized and children left to grow up in a society that tells them they have no value due to the happenstance of their birth? **How do we celebrate life** in this great nation for which when we pull back the cover and look beneath, find a land that was extricated from its indigenous people, rendering them almost invisible? What is it that you believe and how is your celebration of life tempered?

If we pay attention we will see that God reminds us that life is celebrated through the leaping of a baby in a pregnant woman's womb as she finds out that her poor pregnant cousin will birth into the world, the one who will lead us by example in how life is to be celebrated. **Celebrating life is** my wife and aunt on a cold November morning sitting with and comforting my mother in her final hours.

And yes celebrating life is experiencing God in a wife who knew that I would not for long be separated from my passion of flying.

My final question is: Who can point to you and say; “I am able to celebrate life, through my relationship with you?”

Closing

We might not be able to turn water into wine but we can celebrate life with the same care of a hospice worker. Our funds perhaps are too sparse to pay the rent for a family living on the brink of homelessness, but we can give up some of our time and resources to help as the church host families through Family Promise's Interfaith Hospitality Network. **Never can the damage** of manifest destiny be undone; however, life can be celebrated in addressing a wrong that was done to an indigenous people, by simply standing courageously in the gap with our brothers and sisters as they attempt to protect the last of the lands that they are able to occupy. **Visiting those who are sick** and shut in through our visitation ministry exponentially expresses the value we place on each individual life. **Caring for our children** through youth ministry programs provides opportunities for us to shape young lives in a way that predisposes them to celebrate all life. **Turing to the stranger** or traveler on their summer or winter road trip saying you are welcome here without any preconditions, easily sends the message that they are seen and that their life in all of its manifestations is to be celebrated. **And oh yes,** lets never forget or take for granted that celebrating life means that the poor are never a burden, but an opportunity to in the flesh, serve our Lord and Savior.

Our experience on this journey in life is one in which we are called to celebrate. **As a cancer survivor** I do believe as most other survivors do, that: "What matters most is not the amount of days in our life, but the amount of life in our days."

Choose to eat and drink and find satisfaction in your toil doing it all for the glory of God, therefore celebrating life, for again: **This is the day that the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it!**