

LIVE FOR TODAY AND TOMORROW

Sermon, November 12, 2017

Texts: Psalm 78:1-7, Matthew 25:1-13, I Thessalonians 4:13-18

"When I think of all the worries people seem to find, and how they're in a hurry to complicate their minds by chasing after money and dreams that can't come true ... I'm glad that we are different; we've better things to do. May others plan their future; I'm busy loving you. One, two, three, four Sha la la la la live for today and don't worry 'bout tomorrow, hey ey-ey ... those words of "wisdom" come from a band called the Grass Roots, in their 1967 top hit "Live for Today" ... a song that's been humming in my head nearly all week long as I worked on this sermon.

I've mentioned this a few times before, but it's always amazing to me how I can hear a song from my teen years and still remember every single lyric. Every once in a while a song will come on that I had not heard in over forty years and I am able to sing along, remembering every single solitary word (*just this last Friday a song entitled "The Night the Lights Went Out in Georgia", a one-hit wonder sung by Vicki Lawrence in 1972, came on the radio. I think the last time I heard it was 1977 or 78; yet as I sang along I remembered every word of that somewhat sordid ballad!*). Vast amounts of utterly useless lyrics and tunes are up there taking up space in my brain cells, hundreds if not thousands of songs! Don't get me wrong, there are also lots of good songs up there, grand hymns and wholesomely uplifting and inspiring songs from my youth group days with Young Life and delightful songs from Sunday School. *"Sha-la-la-la-la, live for today; Hey-ey-ey ... we were never meant to worry the way that people do, and I don't mean to hurry as long as I'm with you. We'll take it nice and easy and use my simple plan: You'll be my lovin' woman, I'll be your lovin' man. We'll take the most from living, have pleasure while we can ... and the song sort of goes downhill from there with lyrics that would do Harvey Weinstein proud. A hugely popular song, with a message that initially sounds good, almost biblical, but it's a message that can also be seductively dangerous and, frankly, silly. Don't be an idiot! How we live today profoundly affects our tomorrows for good or for ill. What happens in our "todays" doesn't just stay in our "todays"; contrary to that old ad campaign, what happens in Vegas doesn't stay in Vegas. It stays with you for the rest of your life! Let's acknowledge the sober reality that both the amount and the quality of our tomorrows are both profoundly affected by how we live today.*

You may remember the old story of a weather forecast published in an Iowa newspaper that inadvertently left out one very important word. The word was "rain." The report read, *"There is a 90% chance of tomorrow."* Now, I think all of us here hope the chances are better than that! But who knows? It is good to prepare for tomorrow, and it is also good to be prepared just in case there *is* no tomorrow. Yes, *"There is a 90% chance of tomorrow."* It is good to be prepared for whatever tomorrow might, or might not, bring. And the way we best do that is by living our *today's* responsibly and well! Don't live just for today, sha la la la hey hey. **Don't** live like there's no tomorrow! We need to prepare for whatever may come our way, *and* we best do that by living well today. We are to use our time and our resources and our energy and our efforts TODAY to seize the opportunities we may have with an eye to how that will affect our tomorrow. That pertains to our finances, our time, our talents, our places in life, and so on. So, sha-la-la-la live for today AND tomorrow, and pray that God will give you the wisdom to best strike that balance in the day you have, of living fully in the day we have while responsibly anticipating our tomorrows. And we need to do all we can to help the generations after us prepare for whatever may come their way, as well.

(The following was edited out of the 10:30 service sermon; I include it here –slc. "The question weaving throughout our Bible readings is this: Are we living today like there is a tomorrow? Are we prepared? Who knows what tomorrow may bring? 'Therefore keep watch,' Jesus said in today's Gospel, 'because you do not know the day or the hour.' In our Gospel reading, Jesus describes what should be a happy event, a wedding celebration ... BTW, the ten "virgins" can, and probably should, be translated as ten "bridesmaids" based on the context; the Greek word can be rendered both ways. In that culture the customary role of these wedding party attendants was to use their lamps to light the way, to light the processional, from the bride's father's house as the new couple made their way to their new home. There at the new couple's home the joyous wedding banquet takes place after the bridal party arrives. All ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to await the bridegroom. But only five of the bridesmaids were sensible enough to prepare in case of delay; they brought enough oil to refill their lamps if needed. Sure enough, the bridegroom was delayed ... at midnight, they are all awakened by a shout. The bridegroom is on his way, and the other five wound up having to run down to the 24-hour Speedway to buy some more oil. Before they got back, though, the bridegroom had come, the five prepared

*bridesmaids were ready and waiting with their lamps lit, and on they processed to the festive wedding banquet, and the door was shut after they entered. The procession was over; the party began. When the 'foolish five' return from their emergency oil-buying excursion, they have **missed the whole reason they needed their lamps lit ... the processional!** That was their one job, and they missed their moment. With the banquet already underway behind closed doors, these bridesmaids could no longer serve their purpose. They dropped the ball. They failed their 'calling' and the joyous celebration they had anticipated is now taking place without them ... and they knew the painful regret of a missed opportunity to do what they were specifically designed to do. And as Paul intimates in our epistle reading, be prepared so that should we hear the shout of the archangel, 'The Bridegroom is coming' and we hear that final trumpet ... which really could happen at any time ... that we can join the grand procession of all the faithful as the Bridegroom takes His bride, the Church, to the grandest wedding reception of all time." – end of excerpt.)*

Gary Richmond, a former zookeeper at the Los Angeles Zoo and a devoted Christian, wrote a fascinating little devotional entitled **A View from the Zoo**. Richmond recounts witnessing the birth of a giraffe. -- *"When the baby became visible, I asked Jack, the animal expert, 'When will the mother lie down?' 'She won't,' he replied. 'But the baby will drop ten feet to the hard ground,' I countered. We sat in silence until the calf hurled forth, falling ten feet and landing on his back. Within seconds, he rolled to an upright position, legs tucked underneath. After a quick look, the mother positioned herself directly over the baby. She then swung her pendulous leg outward and kicked him! He sprawled head over heels. 'Why did she do that?' I asked. 'She wants it to get up, and if it doesn't she'll do it again,' Jack replied. Sure enough, the violent process was repeated again and again. Finally, the baby stood: wobbly, for sure, but upright at last. I watched in disbelief as the mother kicked it off its feet yet again. Jack offered, 'She wants it to remember how it got up.'"*

The baby giraffe does finally figure out how to get up and stand up to Mom ... and, if he were born in the wild and not in the zoo, he would now be ready to follow Mom and the rest of the herd; ready to walk in safety for all his tomorrows. Usually, in the wild a baby giraffe is ready to go with the herd in just ten hours after he/she is born! Now; I'm not advocating this for human parents, but Mama Giraffe was not being abusive. Quite the contrary! She knows lions and hyenas and leopards would love to make a meal of a baby giraffe. So, she needs her baby to get to its feet as soon as possible so it can keep up with the herd. Kicking is her way of preparing her young one, protecting him from predators. Kicking is her loving way of preparing her young one to walk in a way that provides for more and better tomorrows.

I think the Psalmist suggests a much better technique than Mama Giraffe in preparing our children for their tomorrows. He prescribes a much better way of protecting our children from the literal and figurative predators out there! From our Psalter today, *"... what we have heard and known, what our forefathers have told us, we will not hide from our children; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, the wonders he has done. He decreed statutes ... and established the law..., which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children, so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children. Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commands."*

He is emphatic ... we have a sacred generational trust to not hide these things from our children, or (as other translations have it) to not obscure these things for them. We must do all we can to make the things of God clear to them, if we want them to have more and better tomorrows. That's why we want children growing up in the church, being part of the church community, knowing what this church believes, knowing our faith traditions, so we *and* they can have a brighter and better tomorrow. After all, there is wisdom in the saying that you are only as happy as your least happy child. The Psalmist knows there is a better than 90% chance of tomorrow, and that we and our children will be so much better off in all our tomorrows if we would all trust in God, not forget His deeds, and keep His commands ... as we live for today AND for tomorrow. The question weaving throughout our Bible readings is this: Are we prepared? Are we ready? Are we living today well, in anticipation of our tomorrows?

Keep watch. Watch and be ready. Who knows what door of opportunity might open, and you might find yourself unable to walk through until it is too late? Is there some unfinished business in your life that can be and needs to be taken care of? Who knows if we might even have tomorrow? Be ready! Be prepared, and live in such a way that if there is just a 90% chance of tomorrow, and if you were to be part of that unfortunate 10%, you would have nothing to apologize for, you would have no regrets! Be prepared to be the best you can be, for you never know just who or what may come your way that day. Are we prepared? Are we ready? And are our children being prepared? Are we doing all we can to prepare them for whatever might come their way?

Are we living today like there *is* a tomorrow?