

Call to Worship

Today we will explore life and living. We will contemplate where we give our energy and how we spend our days. Indeed, how we spend our lives. And why we sometimes often place on hold our dreams, for the dreams of others. In the words of the Canadian band known as Nickelback:

“What are you waiting for?”

Everybody's gonna make mistakes
But everybody's got a choice to make
Everybody needs a leap of faith
When are you taking yours?

What are you waiting for?

You gotta go and reach for the top
Believe in every dream that you got
You're only living once so tell me
What are you, what are you waiting for?
You know you gotta give it your all
And don't you be afraid if you fall
You're only living once so tell me
What are you, what are you waiting for?”

Sermon:

By: Rev. "Twinkle" Marie Manning

"The Best of You!"

Nobel Laurette, Novelist,
Poet and Playwright,
Samuel Beckett once questioned
through the voice of one of his characters,

*"Was it to be laughter or tears?
It came to the same thing in the end,
but which was it to be **now**?"*

Launched into the category of being an Absurdist,
in *the Theatre of the Absurd*,

Beckett's characters,
regardless of their frenetic busyness
or ardent stillness,
often with little
or no change
of scene or setting,
and with any semblance of a plot
simply eliminated,
all underscored profound existentialism.

Life in its circular, timeless quality.

Humans as lost creatures,
spending their days waiting.

Uncertain of why or for whom they are waiting.
Uncertain about how long the wait will be,
indeed:
uncertain *how long they should wait*.

And, curious and concerned
about what they should do *while waiting*.

Tragically Comedic on the surface.
Spiritual distress just beneath.
Building from awareness rooted in confusion.

*“Was it to be laughter or tears?
It came to the same thing in the end,
but which was it to be now?”*

Many of us here have searched,
and even found for ourselves,
purposes and meanings of Life.

Certainly it has been the topic and theme
of thousands, if not millions,
of scholarly and creative works.

Psychologists, Historians, Poets, *Ministers*.

Whether your faith is in
evolutionary biology and behavioral sciences,
or mystical interpretations
applied to aspects of the Divine and divinity
...or **both/and**,
for we are complex
in our adaptations
as we analyze our very existence.
And the *meaning* of our existence.
The purpose for it.

Viktor Frankl, in his book, “Man’s Search for Meaning,”
which contains autobiographical accounts
of his experiences and observations
in concentration camps during the Holocaust,

and reads as a psychoanalytical guide
that tells us that
the *Search for Meaning*
is the primary motivation in one’s life.

Explicitly, he says,
*“The meaning is unique and specific
in that it must and can be fulfilled
by **oneself** alone;
only then does it achieve a significance
which will satisfy his own will to meaning. (p.99)*

[[changed him to oneself]]

In his work as a neurologist, psychiatrist, and philosopher,
Frankl placed emphasis on
personal responsibility for one’s life.

Which is admittedly surprising,
and causes one to pause at length to contemplate,
when the ideal of personal responsibility
is written and promoted by a man
whose freedoms were robbed,
his rights to life itself nullified by his captors
and his very existence determined
day by day
and moment by moment
upon the whims of those who imprisoned him.

Was he perhaps speaking with the vision
of metaphysically internalizing
his situation to reflect in his imaginations
something different than his outward circumstances,
as is in some practices
of enlightenment philosophies?

Was it solely an inward journey he was advocating towards?

Apparently not.

For he said,
*“By declaring that man is responsible
and must actualize the potential meaning of his life,
I wish to stress that
the true meaning of life*

*is to be discovered **in the world**
rather than within man or his own psyche,
as though it were a closed system.” (p. 110)*

Frankl also asserted,
seemingly at odds
yet **not** categorically contradictorily,
that,
*“the meaning of life always changes,
but that it never ceases to be.” (p. 111)*

Hmmm.

*“Was it to be laughter or tears?
It came to the same thing in the end,
but which was it to be **now?**”*

Are these actual choices?
How does choosing impact us?
What does it look like when we *act upon* such choices?

The answer resides
*Brilliantly, poetically, and prophetically
as spoken by the profound and confounding Annie Dillard
when she says,
“How we spend our days,
of course,
is how we spend our lives.”*

How do *you* spend *your* days?

Who gets the **Best** of You?

Who, and what, and to where
do you give your time, talents and energies to?

Are you happy about that?
Does it make your heart sing **or** weep?

Does it feel like something is missing?

Do you feel off kilter? Lethargic? Resigned? *Exhausted*?

Do you feel regrets accumulating
in equal proportion
to the wishes accruing in your Bucket List?

Do you wish for *more* **time** in a day?

If you got that wish granted,
what
would
you
do with it?

What would you give *the Best of You* to,
if you had more time?

Because I promise you -
the time is *now*
to claim ***the Best of You***
for yourself.

I know that sounds selfish.
Even, unrealistic.
Improbable, Impractical.

You have so many responsibilities.
People relying on you.
Projects, work, commitments.
To others.

It's absurd to suggest to claim *the Best of You* for yourself.

Especially when things may be unresolved
in facets of your lives.

Especially if it is
heartache and fear that holds you back,
tying up your time.

Rendering you immobile,
unable or unwilling
to move forward
to grasp what *calls to you*.

As singer Dave Grohl
asks and affirms
and asks again:

“Is someone getting the best of you?”

“Has someone taken your faith?”

It's real,
the pain you feel

The life, *the love*
You'd die to heal

The hope that starts,
The broken hearts,

You trust,
you must confess

Is someone getting the best

The best,
the best,
the best of you?

Hope and hopelessness manifesting synonymously.

Absurd.

Yes, such is the theatrics of our realities.

And, time?

It will run out.

And, life?

It will continue to provide
ample reasons
to focus on other things.

Things that merit attention,
yet do not make your heart sing,
and readily occupy the Best of You
and your time.

Life, Abundant in its Tragedies:

People you love dearly will die.
Usually long before you would hope,
and not always gently,
in peaceful ways
that sooth your heart.

Accidents will occur.

Mother Nature's tendencies will have their toll.

Diagnoses will alter your lives
and the lives of your loved ones.

Work,
and/or the worry of it,
in one form or another,
will always be there.

Politics and movements
will be *devout* places
to funnel vast quantities
of discontent and contemptuousness
in striations to improve
the quality of the world,
and the quality of life
for those who reside here.

Tangentially,
Worthy causes,
altruistic endeavors
will openly accept
all
and more
you can dedicate to them.

Which can be *simpatico*.
If doing so irrefutably makes your heart sing.

Know this.
We can spend our days
and our lives,
giving to people, places, and things
out of a sense of obligation,
even a sense of urgency,

and live our lives ***unfilled***,
never quite reaching,
or even reaching for,
that which **is *most meaningful*** to us.

Alternately....
We can abide the sentiment of recently departed America icon,
Lawrence **Ferlinghetti** when he mused,

***“And I may write my own
eponymous epitaph.”***

May that be so for all of us.

Regardless of your age now.
Regardless of what sorrows and struggles you've experience,
and may experience in the future.

What do you want the story of *your* life to be?

How do you want to spend your days?
How do you want to spend *your life*?

Do that!

Please, do that!

Set aside regrets for that which you cannot change.
Release hope for that which never was,
nor will ever be.

Embrace the **Meaning** of **Your** Life!
And live your life in a way that shows you do.
Honor the Meaning of Your Life!

*“Was it to be laughter or tears?
It came to the same thing in the end,
but which was it to be now?”*

Give *the Best of You* to You!

There will be plenty left over
to share with everyone else
you wish to give some to.
To your family, to your friends, to your community.
To causes that need a helping hand.
To projects that interest you and align with your spirit,
yet are secondary to that which makes your heart sing.
You Can give to them too...

But give *the Best of You* to you **first**.

Consider the words of David Brooks,
author of “The Second Mountain, the Quest for a Moral Life,”
when he says,
*“In this day and age,
our primary problems
are at the level of the foundations.*

They are at the level of the systems of relationships.”
He says,
*“The social fabric is not woven by leaders from above.
It is woven at every level,
through a million caring actions,
from one person to another.*

*It is woven by people fulfilling their roles
as good friends, neighbors, and citizens.”*

*(He says)
“Whenever I treat another person
as if he were an object,
I’ve ripped the social fabric.*

*When I treat another person as an infinite soul,
I have woven the social fabric.” (p.308)*

**This is no less true,
when the person we are treating these ways
is ourselves.**

When you give *the Best of You* to you **first**,
you are claiming your place in society,
honoring your inherent worth and dignity.

By giving *the Best of You* to you first,
you model for others how to do the same for themselves.

This does not create a society of self-centered egotistical members.

No. Rather,
it embodies the qualities of collaborative communities,

centering the value of every member equally,
honoring each person's talents and dreams,
and not drawing energies
Vampirically from each other,
nor to excess of what is able to sustain an individual.

When individuals in a family and in a community
take care to take care of themselves,
they are more able to serve and show up
in their families and communities in meaningful ways,
and *sustainably* so.
And, with lighter hearts and happier spirits.
What a blessing that is for everyone.

Giving *the Best of You* to you first, **is an act of love.**
Love for your family.
Love for your community.
Love for yourself.

If you don't already do so, *try that for a while.*

Be brave,
be strong,
above that ***be clear when you answer:***
“How do you really want to spend your days?”

And,
be committed:

Claim your *life* for your own.

Give *the Best of You* to you!

May it be so.

Amen.

Pastoral Benediction

For all life is a gift
Which we are called to use
to make our own days glad.

May you give yourself permission
to receive *the Best of You!*
*May you affirm and support each other
in such endeavors.*

May you be gentle with yourselves
and with each other.

May we meet again.

Amen.