

2 Kings 4:42-44

John 6:1-21

Ephesians 3:14-21

“You open wide your hand and  
satisfy the desire of every living thing.” Amen!

Life is good, and then you die.  
Does that surprise you?

Maybe you have heard a similar  
phrase in a different form.

Let's choose this one instead:  
Life is good, and then you die.

We most often realize life is good when we have  
that feeling of euphoria.

The feeling of being on top of the world;  
present in the moment.

Was it an especially connected conversation  
with a person you care about or  
a walk on the beach as the sun was rising?

Maybe, it was facing a particular challenge in life.

Or was it the feeling of joy from an evening stroll  
as the earth makes her final turn so the sun  
can shine on another part of the world?

These are just a few examples of  
feeling on top of the world.

Sometimes I feel that way when  
I walk a trail in the mountains.

There's life all around you, life you can see and  
life you cannot see but you know it is  
there to feel or smell.

On our trip to the sequoia's in Yosemite.

I confess, I hugged a tree.

I know, you can call me one of those!

But this tree is over a thousand years old!  
Others there are over 2000 years old!

It made me look like a tiny ant in  
the picture Wesley took.

I laughed at myself for literally  
being a tree hugger!

But, it was an “on top of the world” experience  
to feel the energy and life force of  
that massive life form.

Life is good, and then you die.

A life that goes on all around you  
without you even lifting a finger,  
life that is good just happens.

Trees, plants, animals, and people are all alive and  
all at once you feel better than good,  
you feel on top of the world as you come  
to grips with the complexity of creation,

our place in creation and God's paint brush  
that brought it all into existence.

Life is good, and then you die. (Pause)

Or maybe it is the feeling that happens at  
the witness of the birth of a child.

A humbling moment to hold an infant and embrace  
the powerful realization of dependence.

This infant requires your arms to hold her,  
your food to feed her, and your voice  
to soothe her.

Neglect of any of these will cause problems  
for the infant, maybe even death.

The feeling of being on top of the world is present, there, as you realize that this is the kind of love that God has for you.

God's kind of love is the kind that surpasses all understanding but one thing we know is... that this love is good.

The Hebrew word for "good" is "tov."

As someone once wrote  
"tov is an almost ludicrously small word"  
used to describe what God  
accomplished at creation,

but the ways we use the word "good" and  
the way God uses the word "good" are  
staggeringly different.

Think of the "tov" of creation, the good of  
God's intention for you and all people and  
the goodness "tov-ness" that pursues you  
all the days of your life.

It is no wonder we can now say:  
"Life is tov (good), and then you die." (Pause)

Now, I know what you're doing.

You're thinking, "I get it, pastor:

Life is good, but what about  
the "then you die," part?

That sounds a little dark. :-)

Truthfully, I wondered even if  
I should soften that!

Instead, I found that it is meant to be that way.

Dark and a bit harsh because  
we, people, are at our best when we  
recognize the limited time we are given.

We are going to make the phone call,  
finish the will, make a donation,  
seek forgiveness, tell an "I love you" today  
if we recognize there may not  
be a tomorrow.

There is only the now  
and in that now  
there is good.

But, going deeper scripturally speaking,  
life is indeed good,  
when we die a little each day.

When we kill off the ego, the selfishness,  
and kill the desire to close our fists instead of  
opening our hands.

Life is good when we take risks  
for the sake of the gospel and connect with  
people who are outside our immediate tribe

and learn things that  
we didn't know  
we didn't know.

The old self dies a little more and  
guess what is found then?

The full truth that life is good, when you die and  
that turned-in-on-yourself life is crucified  
and buried with Christ so that we can  
be raised with Christ to live as  
new human beings in a new order  
of existence. (Pause)

In his teaching on baptism, Martin Luther  
reminds us that as we die and rise with Christ,  
God's "no" becomes our "no" and  
God's "yes" becomes our "yes."

God's "yes" becomes our "yes" in the words  
from the psalm today when we are told that

God opens God's hand to satisfy the desire  
of every living thing.

We learn to unclench our fists and  
open our hands, too,  
and receive in order to give back.

Hands that carry gifts to give away,  
hands that help and hands  
that gently hold.

None of these things can be done with clenched fists.

Did you notice the open hand language  
in our gospel this morning?

In the miracle feeding of  
the 5000 plus people told in John...

I said "plus" because back then women and  
children were not even counted,  
like they didn't even matter enough  
to be numbered.

It is appalling, but then we look around  
our own communities and see the many layers  
of people who are not counted or  
not considered worthy to be counted  
by people in power.

Yet, like this child in John who offers up  
his small portion of food to Jesus,  
we find more and more the uncounted  
in our society, do indeed count in  
the eyes of God.

They count, in fact, so much that  
they are often the impetus for  
miracles to happen.

For in many different places in the Bible  
we find that God takes the most unlikely of  
human beings to work miracles and  
surprise the hard-hearted.

All of those multitudes, women, children, and  
the men were on top of the world that day  
because of one little boy who unclenched  
his fist and shared. (Pause)

How will we unclench our fists, today?

First by recognizing that our nature is to grab it,  
keep it for ourselves and for only us,  
but when we do the miracles  
in life cease and we find ourselves  
no longer feeling on top of the world.

We are told in John that Jesus knew  
what he was going to do when he looked up  
and saw the crowd coming.

He knew, but he wanted to test the disciples  
to see if they knew.

But do not misunderstand Jesus' point and purpose.

It was not to perform miracles or even  
to feed the hungry, he did those things  
but his purpose was to reveal to us who  
God is and what God is up to  
in intimacy and nearness. (Pause)

Some of those at the feeding of the 5000  
misunderstood Jesus and tried to take him  
by force to make him king.

We are told that Jesus knew what  
they were about to do so he withdrew to  
the mountain by himself.

A more exact translation is that  
he fled to the mountain.

He literally *ran away* from the crowd.

Jesus will not be grabbed with a fist

and used for human purposes.

Now, with the disciples left on their own  
they take the initiative and push out to sea.

Then darkness comes, as it always does and  
we get once again a vivid picture of  
the human condition.

We remember that people want to do it  
on their own according to our own control  
and then the disciples find themselves in  
the same situations where  
we sometimes find ourselves.

On a rough sea, blinded by darkness and wanting,  
but not having, Jesus in their possession. (Pause)

What kinds of turmoil are you in?

The past year and a half have been rough,  
lonely, and scary.

Place on top of that the problems of racism  
embedded in our structures and political divides,  
the inequity and loss of freedom  
for many people.

There is no map for us and it feels like

we are battling forces too great for us to handle.

(Pause)

In an article from Robert Hoch,  
he quotes Sally Mann from her memoir, *Hold Still*:

“Do you know how a boatman faces one direction,  
while rowing in another?”

In an Alcoholics Anonymous group, one person  
says that they learned to see the past  
as a reference point but not as a residence.

We can do this, too.

The boatman pulls in his oars, and  
our physical gaze only takes in where  
we have been.

How will we ever get to our destination?

“The brutal truth,” according to  
James K.A. Smith is this:  
You can’t get there from here.

Not even a map is enough.

You might already have realized

where you need to go, but the question is  
how to get there?

What if God sent a boat?

What if the Creator captained a ferry [for you]  
from that other shore?"

Today's message and gospel reminds us  
this is something that Christ would do.

Even as simple as opening your hand and  
recalling the words.

Life is good, then you die.

AMEN!