

Deut. 30:11-20  
John 1: 1-14

PAUMC  
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“Life is....?”

Almighty and ever living God, you have touched our hearts this Christmas season as we celebrated Your gift of love, now we ask You to direct our lives that they may bear witness to this gift. And may the words of our mouths and meditations of hearts be acceptable in Thy sight. Amen.

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One of the exciting things that happened not long ago on the island of Santorini, where we lived for the last several years was the opening of a public library. As soon as I learned of it, I took the bus to the main town to visit it and ask for a library card. By our standards it is not a very large library, but certainly has resource materials that I was able to use for research as well as fairly sizable collection of reading materials that could be checked out. One of the books that I borrowed I had read previously in English, but now had the chance to read in the original Greek, was by Nikos Kazantzakis, a fairly well known author who gained some renewed recognition as well as some unfair notoriety a few years ago when a movie was made of his novel, The Last Temptation of Christ. Kazantzakis was of an intensely poetic and religious nature who moved through various phases of philosophical interest before he returned to the orthodox faith of his youth. He is probably best known for two earthy and realistic novels, The Greek Passion, written in 1938 and another novel written in 1948. It was this latter novel that I checked out of the

library on Santorini... The Life and Checkered Career of Alexis Zorbas. Most of us here would recognize this book by its transliterated title... Zorba the Greek, and if you haven't read the book, you probably have seen the Academy Award winning movie. If you are familiar with it you will recall that the gist of the story was the companionship that developed between a shy English writer of Greek descent and a boisterous, gregarious Greek peasant with an astonishing zest for life. But throughout the story there are also some nagging philosophical and theological questions—questions that center not only on a meaning of life, but also upon the consequences of the choices made in that life.

There may even be some who remember the short-lived musical “Zorba.” Those of you that do will recall that the setting begins in a coffee house and a village square in a small town on the island of Crete. The villagers are gathered about having a somewhat crude and raucous discussion on the vicissitudes and meaning of life, when a woman who has been battered by life's tribulations jumps up and breaks in with the words: “Listen to me—I will tell you.” And then she begins to sing:

“Life is what you do when you're waiting to die,  
Life is all the time you're sad.  
Life is what you do when you're waiting to die,  
And that's the only joy you have.  
Life is what you do when your waiting to die,  
And that's how the time goes by.”

At this point Zorba makes his appearance and shouts out:

“No...No! I believe in grabbing at life,  
Every minute a new minute,  
Every second a new second.  
Listen to me—I will tell you.  
Life—Life is—Let me put it this way.

When I hear a bazouki, and I can't tell you  
how many times I have heard the bazouki,

Each time is for the first time.  
When I look at a flower, and I can't tell you  
how many times I have looked a flower,  
I stick my nose in, I stare at it's petals,  
And each time is for the first time.  
Each time is the first time.

My friends, by way of this rather long introduction, we have come to the singular question that I want us to ponder this first Sunday of the New Year as we move away from the story of the babe in the manger to the confirmation of the Divine nature of Jesus by the magi. In light of the birth but perhaps even more importantly, with the belief in the manifestation of the Divine Being entering into that earthly existence, the Word of God that became flesh, which we celebrate as Epiphany, in light of that belief, how are we to think about and live our lives. Is life just what we do while we are waiting to die or is it to be seen as that which brings to us each day new hopes, new expectations, new challenges, new experiences? And this is no idle question. For how we answer it has a lot to do with how we view our lives in relation to the life of the Son of God... the Word of God.

To answer this question we should look again at the scripture lesson that was read to us this morning, both from Deuteronomy and the Gospel of John, for there is a certain symmetry here.

“For this commandment which I command you this day is not too hard for you, neither is it far off,” says the Lawgiver. “...the word is very near you, it is in your mouth and in your heart.” So also says the Gospel theologian. “In the beginning was the word And the word was with God, and the word was God...In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.” “This day,” says the Deuteronomist... “This day, I have set before you life and death... therefore choose life...”

I can think of no more scriptural power than can be found in these verses. And while they may evoke any number of possible considerations, for our purposes this morning, as our thoughts move with those three Kings, I want us to ponder three; and I will go through them quickly: The inescapable decision, the immediacy of that decision, and the nearness of the Word once that decision has been made.

Moses said, "I have set before you life and death, therefore choose life." (Deut. 30:19) All of us face tough choices. Sometimes we duck them. Sometimes we address them. But even when we address them we do not always decide to resolve them. Sometimes we simply brood endlessly over possible outcomes or agonize about paths to pursue. And even if we do try to resolve them we do not always do so by some prayerful reflection. More often than not we simply bull our way through to a conclusion—as though getting it *resolved* were more important than getting it *right*.

We are called upon daily to make the right choices that encompass every area of our lives. Christian values raise tough choices and tough choices are never easy. With those ancients in the wilderness as they heard the words of Moses the Lawgiver it was for the inheritance of a promised land and a way of life, but for us it is a decision for a way of life and the inheritance of an eternal one. We are called to live as we say that we believe. For with Paul we say, "In Him we live and move and have our being." (Acts 17:28)

Now I am well aware that this is known as preaching to the converted. But I am equally aware that every one of us can become a little lazy in our faith. And while we come to church to hear again that "Jesus Loves me! This I know!", we need also to be reminded that "Jesus calls us o'er the tumult, saying 'Christian, Follow me!'" At the same time I am aware there may well be someone in this church this morning, someone

beginning... each moment a new moment, each day a new day? For Christ makes all things  
new. Amen.

### A Prayer for Epiphany

Almighty God,  
You who made of one blood all nations and peoples,  
and, by that star in the East,  
revealed to all humankind Him whose name is Emmanuel.  
Give us, O Lord, the faith of those Eastern kings.  
Enlighten our understanding with the light which enlightened theirs,  
and move our hearts that we may follow this light  
and sincerely seek the One who first sought us.  
Enable us who have come to know your presence in our lives  
so to proclaim his unsearchable and unending riches  
that all may come to his light  
and bow before the brightness of his rising,  
The One who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit,  
now and for ever, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

ANNOUNCEMENTS: Sunday, January 4, 1998

HOLY COMMUNION

- A. It has long been the custom....and we do like to announce for the benefit of.....that the TABLE OF OUR LORD is open....one does not...
- B. HIS TABLE IS OPEN to all....and we invite all of you to receive... on this the FIRST SUNDAY.....trusting that this may be an occasion of spiritual renewal...reaffirmation...rededication of your life... Good time to confirm those resolutions of a NEW YEAR.
- C. Procedure...elements will be served to you in the pews....upon receiving them, hold....

GREETING / VISITORS

- A. We greet the visitors...delighted to have you here....do hope we shall have the opportunity....be free in the sharing....fill out, sign one.....COME, WORSHIP.....COME, WORK with us....
- B. Minister here in the name of Christ...doing the Lord's work at this busy corner of God's Kingdom since 1837.....Martin Van Buren was President. Lincoln was defeated in a race for Speaker of the House. Queen Victoria on the throne.....some people gathered over a saloon at 85th Street and Third Avenue...following Sunday...March 10th, 1837 they came to this location and started a church.
- C. Fourth building. Minister in the name of Christ and it is in HIS open and loving spirit that we greet you. Wear name tags. Greet a child.....

PARISH CONCERNS

- A. Parish concerns...listed in your bulletin. Note that we have a January 18th "pot luck" supper in the works....to celebrate the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr....Speaker: Rev. Ian Straker whom some of you know....sign up downstairs for what you can bring for the "POT LUCK" Supper....two weeks from tonight. 6 pm
- B. How nice to welcome the Rev. Kenneth Halcott to our pulpit once again. A long time friend of our church, as is his wife, Andrea...in recent years they have been making their home in Santorini, Greece....returning to the States for a family visit....this year they are returning permanently. For close to 15 or 16 years, Ken has brought us the message, the communion meditation on the first Sunday....

( over )

B. (continued....)

Grateful for coming to us.....for his continuing interest and support. Welcome back, Ken...Andrea, too! Sermon title is, as you may have already noted, is....."LIFE IS.....?"

CHRISTMAS REFLECTIONS

- A. It was a good Christmas for our church. I would THANK all who took on extra responsibilities to make it so....pageant...coffee hours, party.....carol sing...Christmas Eve...a lot going on....
- B. Thanks to all who responded with a special Christmas "love gift"... Such gifts are still coming in.
- C. Financial canvass is nearing completion. The GOOD NEWS is that to date we have received \_\_\_\_\_ pledges toward our budgeted goal of \$ 1,000...those pledges total \$ \_\_\_\_\_.
- D. Still hope for another 50 pledges to put us over the top. The "NOT SO GOOD NEWS" is that it's not too late to respond with a pledge.....some "40" renewals still out there....
- E. Boxes of 1998 offering envelopes are on the table in the rear of the sanctuary. Pick up the box that has your name on it....close to 300 boxes.....alphabetically arranged.....if you need help, let us know.

OFFERING

- A. And now let us worship God with our tithes, our gifts and our offerings remembering the words of Jesus that....

"IT IS MORE BLESSED TO GIVE  
THAN IT IS TO RECEIVE".