

## The Good Life?

Amos 6:1a,4-7

Psalm 146

1 Timothy 6:6-19

Luke 16:19-31

What do we mean when we say we want a “good life”? Most of us, if asked, might picture a roof over our heads, good food on the table, freedom from worry, financial security, maybe the chance to enjoy family and friends, to travel a little, to savor the fruits of our labor. The “good life” is one of those phrases that everyone nods along with — because it sounds like THE goal, doesn’t it?

This morning’s readings remind us that it’s possible to have all the markers of “the good life” and still not be fully alive. To have wealth without connection. To have security but no openness. To be anesthetized rather than animated by the Spirit of God.

The prophet Amos says, “Woe to the complacent” — those who confuse comfort with life. Our Psalm proclaims that the Lord is the God of the living, who feeds the hungry and lifts up those bowed down. Paul, writing to Timothy, urges us to “take hold of the life that really is life.” And in Jesus’ parable, Lazarus — the poor man lying outside the gate — receives *parakaleitai*, comfort and encouragement from God’s Spirit, while the rich man is left isolated and empty. So the question is put before us: what kind of life are we after? The shallow counterfeit, or the life infused by the Spirit of God — a life that comforts, uplifts, and endures?

The prophet Amos begins with a warning: “*Woe to the complacent.*” He paints a picture of the wealthy in Israel reclining on ivory couches, feasting on lamb, strumming idle songs, anointing themselves with rich oils. They look like they are living the “good life.” And yet, Amos says, their comfort is counterfeit. Because while they indulge, the nation around them is crumbling. While they feast, others starve. While they relax, justice falls apart. Amos isn’t condemning feasting or music or oil. He’s condemning insulation. The kind of living that walls itself off, that confuses comfort with life, that cannot see the ruin at the gate.

By contrast, Psalm reminds us of the God who is truly alive and who gives life. The psalmist tells us not to put our trust in rulers or human wealth — they perish and return to the earth.

Instead, put your trust in the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth. And what does this God do? *He gives justice to the oppressed, food to the hungry, freedom to the prisoner, sight to the blind. He lifts up those who are bowed down. He loves the righteous. He sustains the orphan and the widow.* This God is not anesthetized, not insulated, not complacent. This God is alive and active — and real life, the psalm insists, is found by joining God’s work.

Paul takes it a step further in his letter to Timothy: *“Take hold of the life that really is life.”* Notice, Paul doesn’t say, “Life is bad, escape it.” He doesn’t say, “Wealth is evil, reject it.” He says: *Life that really is life is not found in the love of money, in chasing possessions or security.* Those things, he says, are traps — snares that plunge people into ruin. Instead, Paul invites us into a reordering of desire. Set your hope not on wealth but on God. Be rich in good works. Be generous. Share. Then, he says, you will take hold of what is truly life.

And then we come to Jesus’ parable in Luke — the story of the rich man and poor Lazarus. The rich man has everything: fine clothes, daily sumptuous feasts. What’s striking is that the rich man isn’t portrayed as violent, cruel, or hateful. His sin is indifference. He has the good life, but he does not have the life that is truly life.

Lazarus has nothing: sores on his body, hunger in his belly, dogs licking his wounds. And yet when death comes, the roles are reversed. Lazarus is carried by angels into the bosom of Abraham, and the rich man finds himself in torment, longing for even a drop of water.

Here’s where the language gets interesting. Luke tells us that Lazarus is *parakaleitai* — comforted. The Greek verb *parakaleō* means not just to comfort, but also to encourage, to come alongside. Lazarus is upheld, strengthened, enfolded in God’s presence. That same word is linked to the title *Paraclete* — the Advocate, the Holy Spirit — the one who comforts, strengthens, encourages, and walks alongside us. So Lazarus, the one who had no comfort in this life, is now held in the embrace of God’s Spirit. The rich man, meanwhile, who lived insulated from Lazarus, is cut off from that very comfort.

Lazarus, whose very name means “God helps,” receives the Spirit’s comfort because he had nothing else. He was open to God’s help because he was empty of the world’s false securities. The tragedy of the rich man is not simply that he had wealth, but that he walled himself off from that Spirit-filled comfort. He had no need for God, so he had no room for God.

Notice something else: the rich man calls Abraham “father.” He appeals to the covenant identity. But covenant is not about mere titles or ancestry, it’s about living covenant values. And the rich man’s life did not embody those values. Covenant relationships are lived out through action — through generosity, through love, through openness to one another.

This is where liberation theology sheds powerful light. Gustavo Gutiérrez writes, *“If there is no friendship with the poor and no sharing of the life of the poor, then there is no authentic commitment to liberation, because love exists only among equals.”* In other words, salvation is about entering into the fullness of life now, alongside the poor, in solidarity, as equals. Our calling as disciples is not to wall ourselves off but to live alongside, to share life, to embody the Spirit’s comfort together.

This is not just ancient wisdom. It is a word for us right now. As you know, our nation faces the possibility of slashing funding programs or a government shutdown. If this happens, it will not be those with power and privilege who suffer most. It will be the families who depend on food programs, the federal workers who live paycheck to paycheck, the vulnerable who already have too little.

This is where Christians have a very real opportunity to live out this gospel. When the world withdraws comfort, God calls the church to step forward in Spirit-filled generosity and solidarity. We cannot do everything. But we can notice Lazarus at the gate. We can offer companionship, food, encouragement, prayer, support. We can embody the life that really is life — not a gated life of isolation, but a Spirit-led life of communion.

So the question comes back to us: What life do we want? Our culture tells us that “the good life” is about accumulation. Work harder, save more, buy more, insulate yourself from risk,

seek security at all costs. But these texts confront us with a radical claim: that kind of life may look appealing, but it is not really life. It's a counterfeit. Real life is not found in productivity, possessions, or even experiences. Real life is found in communion — with God, with neighbor, with the poor, with the Spirit who comforts and empowers.

The tragedy of the rich man is not simply that he had wealth. It's that he had wealth without connection, without openness, without solidarity. He insulated himself until his soul shrank.

Think about how easy it is today to become insulated. Our technology lets us filter our news, our feeds, our neighborhoods, our friends. We can create lives where we never have to encounter those who are different, those who are struggling, those who might demand something of us. We can numb ourselves with entertainment, possessions, productivity. And yet — in that numbing, that insulation — we risk missing life itself. We risk anesthetizing ourselves to the Spirit's presence. But the Spirit is inviting us to a deeper life. To the life that is really life. A life infused by the Spirit's presence. A life that shares God's comfort — not hoarding it but extending it. A life that refuses to wall itself off from others. That is the call of the gospel.

Friends, God is not calling us to live anesthetized lives, shrunk down by wealth and worry and walls. God is calling us to abundant life. To eternal life. To communal, Spirit-filled life.

The question is not whether we want the "good life." The question is whether we will settle for the shallow counterfeit — or open ourselves to the life that is really life.

May we be a people who take hold of that life with open hands and open hearts — a people who notice Lazarus at the gate, who embody God's comfort, who shine with the Spirit's abundant love in a world that hungers for what is real.