

It's a Glorious Life
Isaiah 43:1-7; John 17:20-24

Good morning! First, I want to say how honored I am to be invited here this morning to preach on Consecration Sunday. Kind of a high pressure thing. I would rather have been invited on a Sunday in July -- but that's okay. The church I serve as pastor is Frenchtown Presbyterian, just up the Delaware River, and we have a pretty cool connection to Hamilton Square. Our youth director is Rob Ross, a child of this church, raised here, family still here. And I have to tell you, you did a pretty good job! You know, you never know... You see these little kids in Sunday School drawing little stick pictures of Jesus and putting felt on the board, and just being really cute; then they grow into teenagers and they're playing basketball, breaking the occasional window, and asking lots of tough questions. And all along the way, you're trying to love them -- love them like Jesus loves them, and praying that they grow to love Jesus. And you just never know... You never know what someone is going to become, and how they are going to impact the world, and the difference they are going to make in someone's life. They might become a youth minister; maybe a pastor, or a missionary; or a doctor, or teacher, or attorney; or a mom, or dad, or spouse, or anything -- you never know what will happen.

Two weeks ago I was standing under a beautiful oak tree in Princeton, huge spreading branches, and it was just raining acorns. You've been under those trees this month. I looked at that tree, and those acorns, and thought: that came from this! This grand oak grew from this little acorn. This little acorn found a fertile place to grow, and year by year, it grew and grew, and now it's a glorious tree. Today I want to ask you imagine this: imagine that this acorn is your life. Everything about your life -- past, present, future, accomplishments, career, gifts, talents, finances, hopes, dream, everything. This acorn is your life. What would happen if you plant this in the soil of God's love and will? Today is Consecration Sunday, it's the culmination of the Stewardship campaign, and everyone is expecting that I'm going to talk about giving and about money. And I guess I am -- but I want to talk about more than that. Today I want to talk about life. And money is a part of life, but it's just a part of life; and anyone who has a lot of money will tell you money is not all there is to life. And God cares about your life, not just your finances. So I want to talk today about life.

The text I just read from Isaiah is one of the most beautiful statements in the Bible of how God feels about your life. To get into it, you first have to realize that these words are spoken to people that are living in exile. For two and a half generations they lived as a second-class people in exile in Babylon. They lost their homes and their land, and were forced to live in a foreign place. They lost their names, the names of their fathers and grandfathers, mothers and grandmothers, and were forced to take foreign names. They lost their dignity, forced to be servants of the people who captured them, to adopt their customs and worship their gods. They lost their hope; they felt that no one was "coming to get them." This was their life and their lot. Israel was brought face to face with the question of their existence: is this it? This was not the first time they asked that question. When God rescued them from slavery in Egypt, God led them into the wilderness. There was no food or water, and they cried out to God, "Why! Is this it? Have you brought us out here to die? Is this all there is? Why?!"

Have you ever asked the why question? What's the purpose of life? What is life really all about? Have you ever walked into a room -- and I know some of you have done this -- you walk in and go, why am I here? What did I come in here for? There's often a moment in life where you just kind of hear this

voice inside you going, what is this all about? What am I doing here? What it's supposed to be about? We know *what* happens, basically what you're supposed to do. You work hard in school, get a good job, start a family, buy a house, maybe have some children, get involved in the community, make some friends; travel a little; try to pay off debt; save for college (good luck!); save for retirement. One day you retire and you hope to enjoy the rest of your days.

But that's the what of life – that's what you do. There is a moment at some point where you get deeper than that, and you ask the why question? Why am I doing this and not that? Where is the purpose, the meaning in these choices I am making and the path I'm taking? Usually this moment comes when you find yourself in exile: when you're facing a change in your life; when you have to make a big decision that could change the course of life; when you experience a big loss; or when you plans you had for the future have come off the rails. PERSONAL STORY of going financial advisor – “this is real life.” In those moments, we're pressed to go deeper than the “what” of our lives, and get into the why. What is the meaning of my life? What's it all about?

At this point in Israel's story, after being brought face-to-face with the question of their existence in exile, God speaks to them a powerful word of hope and clarity. I want us to focus in on this one line, in verse 7: “For you are my people, whom I created, whom I formed and made for my glory.” Made for *my glory*. There was the clue to the meaning of their existence; that was the clue to the purpose of their life. God called this guy named Abraham and promised to make a great nation out of him; when Abraham's children ended up in slavery Egypt, without a homeland, God rescued them from Egypt and gave them a land. God established Israel, and then sent them into exile, and God rescued them again – all to for God's glory. This wasn't by accident, this wasn't for no reason. God created Israel for God's glory; God formed Israel so that they would be a living sign that of God's goodness, and love, and power.

This is not just what God is doing with Israel; God is doing this with you. God created you, knit you together in your mother's womb. You are not an accident; you may have been an accident to your parents, but you are no accident to God. You are made and formed for God's glory. When you and I were separated from God, God rescued us by sending his only Son into our exile to bring us out. Christ came to bring us back to God. God has made his home with you and me; God has claimed you as his beloved child. God has made you and formed you for a purpose, for God's own glory. You know, I'm sure you know this, the first question in the Westminster Catechism: What is the chief end of humanity? To glorify God and enjoy him forever. You are no accident, and God is not indifferent to your life. God created you for God's own glory. God formed you to be a sign shows God's goodness, love, and power. There is such freedom in that, such good news in that. Often people ask today, is the church relevant to today's world? The answer is yes! Because every person, every person in Hamilton Square and Central Jersey, at some point will ask this question: why am I here? The church has the amazing privilege to offer this word of truth and love: you are here are formed and made for God's glory.

If you and I can get clear about that, it can change everything else. Imagine you have a job description for your life, and at the top is the heading: objective. If I can fill that in on my life's job description, “objective: to be a sign of God's goodness, love, and power”, then everything else on the list begins to take shape in a new way. Can I glorify God in my friendships? Yes. Can I glorify God in how I relate to my spouse? Yes. Can I glorify God in how I raise my children? Yes. Can I glorify God in how I pursue my career? Yes. Can I glorify God in how I run my business, in how I treat my clients? Can I glorify

God in how I relate to my boss? Yes. Can I glorify God in how spend my free time? Yes. Can I glorify God in how I use my finances and spend my money? Yes. Does it change what I put down on a pledge form? Yes. Because if I can grasp that everything in my life can bring glory to God, then money is just another part of my life that be used for God's glory. When someone looks at my calendar, I want them to see more than just a string of events and things I did; I want them to see that I used my time to show God's goodness. When someone looks at my accomplishments, I want them to see that I wasn't just trying to get ahead, but my life was a living sacrament that pointed to God's goodness. When someone looks at my financial statements, I want them to see I wasn't trying to get stuff and do stuff, but I was using my resources to the glory of God.

To the glory of God. TGG. YOLO. You only live once. TGG. To the Glory of God. Written across every part of my life. All my dreams; all my hopes; all my accomplishments; all my success; all my possessions; all my relationships. To the Glory of God. All my pain; all my loss; all my failures; all my regrets. To the Glory of God. That is what it means to consecrate your life. That is what it means to see your life as acorn that you plant in the soil of the love and will of God. Full of glory, full of grace; formed and made by the Maker of the World. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.