

We have heard Isaiah declaring what God saying, **“My thoughts are not like your thoughts nor are your ways like my ways.”** Our thoughts and ways are not like God’s. He has a different agenda. He dwells in a different dimension.

We’re thinking, preserving the body; he is thinking, saving the soul. We dream of a pay raise. He dreams of raising the dead. We avoid pain and seek peace. God uses pain to bring peace. “I’m going to live before I die,” we resolve. “Die, so you can live,” he instructs. We love what decays. He loves what endures. We rejoice at our successes. He rejoices at our confessions. God rules the universe.

A parish recently chose a mother with 9 children as its **“mother of the year.”** When asked if she loved all nine children equally, she said, “My love depends on what each child needs at any given moment and where they are at any given time.”

Jesus seems to have a similar response in mind in today’s parable. Hearing the story, many of his listeners, including us, want to cry “unfair.” It does seem unjust that those who worked for one hour received the same wage as those who worked the longest hours.

This parable is not about the workers’ wages but about generosity. A longtime faithful follower and a recent remorseful sinner stand before the Lord equally. God’s goodness counterbalances any human standard as a reward for hard work. Like the mother with nine children, **God sees where each child is and waits to give them what “they need at any given moment.”**

Epitaphs normally sum up a person’s life in just a few words. For examples, titles of two memoirs: **“70 years, few tears, hairy ears.”** Another: **“Cursed with cancer. Blessed with friends.”** If you had to sum up your life in just a few words, how would you do it?

St. Paul writes from a prison cell. Even prison helped his ministry to spread the gospel. His steadfast witness has won a great number of converts. He knows he could be facing death sentence. Yet, he writes what that might mean for him—it’s a win/win situation. He sums it up in two three-words memoirs: **“life is Christ; death is gain.”** A persecutor of Christians, Paul met the risen Christ on the way to Damascus and gave his life to Christ completely. He had a profound effect on the growth of the early church.

An executive recruiter, a head-hunter for the companies, told his friend, Josh McDowell his recent experience in an interview. “Well, I was interviewing this fellow the other day. I had him relax with my usual gestures like offering a glass of water, taking my coat off, and talking about football and family. Then I leaned up and said, **“What’s the purpose of your life, Bob?”** It’s amazing how top executives fall apart at that question. But he said, without blinking an eye, **‘To go to heaven and take as many people with me as I can.’** For the first time in my career. I was speechless.”

You and I probably use different language, but could you state our life purpose could contain a reference to Christ? For example, could you say, **“To leave this world a better place and to glorify**

Christ in all I do.” Or “To live a life of love following the example of Christ.” The question is, is your faith the pre-eminent decider in choosing your life purpose?

“Life is Christ.” That’s a three-word memoir that sums up the abundant life. What would you substitute in its place? ‘Life is work?’ “Life is football?” “Live is my iPod?” Surely you can see how pathetic that is. I suspect some of you would say, “Life is my family.” And certainly, family is important. But here is the truth. There are many people with good jobs, good pay, a great family, and fun hobbies, but when we come to the end of the day, they realize that none of those are enough to satisfy their deepest hunger.

NO wonder people seek to get lost at work, in meaningless recreation and in drugs and alcohol. If that is all there is, life is hardly worth the effort. But that is not all there is. **“Life is Christ,”** said St. Paul. As someone has said, **“Life without Christ is a hopeless end, but with Christ, it’s an endless hope.”**

That doesn’t surprise me at all. **“Life is Christ.”**

But what about that 2nd three-words memoir: **“Death is gain?”** That requires greater faith. We rarely talk about the eternal dimension of our faith, heaven, and life after death, except in Easter time. But it is an integral part of what it means to follow Christ. Here St. Paul’s faith shines through once again. **“For me life is Christ and to die is gain.”** If he lived, he could continue sharing his faith in Christ. If he died, he knew he would be going home to be with Christ—win/win.

It’s like a story that is told about an evangelist Dwight Moody. Moody was traveling on a boat on one of the great lakes when a really bad storm developed. The other passengers on the boat cowered in fear. They started praying asking God to deliver them from the storm. Moody didn’t join them. When asked why not, he answered with these words, **“I have one sister in Chicago and one in heaven and I don’t care which I see this night.”**

This is basically what St. Paul is saying. “Life is Christ ... there is much to be done.” However, “death is gain ... I’m going home to be with Christ.”

If you were to sum up your life in a six or eight-word memoir, how would it be read?

One writer suggests that our memoirs would be quite different from St. Paul’s. For example: “Life is an entertainment, death is to miss all the fun.” “Life is all of the things I want, to die is to lose them all.”

“Life is to be in the best of health, death is to lose my life, what now?” It is a sobering thought. Could we sum up our lives in the way St. Paul summed up his? **“For me life is Christ; death is gain.”**