

## Lights Please October 21, 2007

I'm sure many of us have heard the famous lines from Shakespeare's *As You Like It*:

**"All the world's a stage,  
And all the men and women merely players.  
They have their exits and their entrances;  
And one man in his life plays many parts."**

I suppose there are many ways a listener could interpret those lines, but one of the most common ways of understanding those words is the world is nothing but a theatrical stage where we humans are actors. The rest of the soliloquy goes on to outline the various stages of our lives, from birth to old age when we play out the final scene.

even thinking this whole thing is just a dress rehearsal for something else. Maybe we begin to believe that we're just acting something out, but it's not for real.

least, I think this is it, since I'm not altogether convinced that reincarnation is a possibility.

**the door. You go in and sit down and you either love the show or you don't. If you do, terrific. And if you don't—that's show business."**

I guess I'd have to say that I like his analogy—to a point. Being born is the entry point—yes, but I think the problem we sometimes get into is that we do go in and sit down, and that's all we do. We just observe what's going on; we don't really get engaged and participate. Many of us live our lives as though we're disinterested bystanders or folks just standing in the wings, watching, but only watching.

We're just sitting and watching when we find ourselves wondering why everybody else seems to have it all together, when we aren't willing to try to figure out the possibilities for our own life. We're just standing in the wings when we play the victim role, whining that we're just the understudy, that we never really get a chance to go on stage ourselves.

We can stay trapped in our existence through all kinds of excuses, like blaming our spouse or our partner or our upbringing for our not achieving what we think we deserve. We're just observers to life when we have no investment in what's going on. We're just breathing and taking up air and space when we have no passion around living, no sense of our purpose in being, no direction for our lives. It's as though real life is going on all around us, but we're not in it.

We can live that way—sure. We have that option. But let me tell you, I'm convinced that's not why we're here. I don't think God has created us and given us life so that we just passively watch the

whole thing go by. We can do that, but that's not life; that's just merely existing.

You may recall hearing about the tombstone that read, "Here lies John Brown (or we can fill in the blank with our own name). Dead at 30; buried at 60." We could "Get a light?" those 30 September 2007 would be the appropriate tombstone, because of the way we're living.

The reality is that we have a choice. I've always liked what the writer of Deuteronomy shares about the choice God gives us. We can choose life, or we can choose death. It's up to us. In Deuteronomy, God gives us the choice, but God also urges us to **"Choose life."** In some ways, Dan Millman is saying a similar thing when he said, **"In every moment, the quality of your life is on the line. In each, you are either fully alive or relatively dead."**

Our Bible passage for today really reinforces the God-urging that we choose life and live fully. In this passage from the book of Isaiah, it says: **"I have come in order that you might have life—life in all its fullness."** The gift that Jesus offers us, and the life he demonstrates for us, is a life that lived in all its fullness. It's a life on the line, where we're fully engaged, fully invested, breaking where we're actively involved. We have an awareness of why we're here, and a keen sense of purpose that comes from the awareness that God has created us and moves us forward.

You see, a full life is one that is one the edge, where we often take risks and step into a future that we're not sure of. It's as John Shedd once wrote, **"A ship in harbor is safe—but that is not what ships are for."** To alter his quote to fit our purposes, we might say, **"A life that's comfortable and secure is safe, but that's not what life is for."**

So, OK, you may be thinking. "If we're supposed to live life fully, where do we start?" Frankly, I believe it starts with getting to know ourselves. Who is the person that God has created that goes by our name? What are our interests and skills and abilities? What do we really enjoy thinking about, or studying, or reading about? What are we doing when the time flies by? When is it that we have experienced a sense of satisfaction, knowing that what we did made a difference? We begin to live more fully when we begin to know and understand ourselves. As Joan Erikson was quoted as saying, **"A full life needs to be about self-cultivation."**

But, in my opinion, a full life isn't just about self-cultivation; it continues forward to determine how who we are can enhance both our lives and the lives of others. It's getting outside ourselves and focusing on the world around us to see what role we can play in the larger drama. I believe that, once we begin to answer at least some of the questions about ourselves that I just mentioned, then we need to ask God to show us where we can share ourselves with others. Where is it that what we have

to offer is wanted and needed? What can we do that make life better for ourselves and others?

You know, I'm not talking about grandiose things. We can't all be Mother Therasas, but every single one of us can make another person's burdens a little lighter. We can't all be Albert Schweitzers, but we can put a band aid on the cut finger of a child, or rub the shoulders of a friend who's had a hard day. Our living will not necessarily make the headlines of the paper, but every action will be filled with a sense of meaning when we reach outside ourselves.

If all we do is navel-gaze, we become so self-absorbed that we can't see the tears and we can't hear the cries of those around us. But when we look up and look out, we see those who need a word of encouragement or a friendly smile to brighten their day. And my friends, when we brighten someone else's day, odds are we'll find our own a little brighter and a little more meaningful. That's a part of our purpose in being.

Len Sweet, in his book *Carpe Manana*, says that some among us are beginning to define a little more clearly what a full life, a life with purpose and meaning may be. He writes that the following are some of the ways we might answer the question: What is my purpose here? How should I live?

- Build a better neighborhood**
- Build better relationships**
- Build better families**
- Build a better world**
- Build a better environment**
- Build a better you.**

We can't do any of those things, or anything of meaning at all if we just stand in the wings, or sit in the audience, or treat every day as though it were a dress rehearsal for the real thing. This is it! It is the "real thing." To live fully, we have to gather do our preparation, gather up our courage, walk out on stage, and say, "Lights, please."

Closing;

Emile Zola once said, **"If you ask me what I have come to do in this world, I who am an artist, I will reply: I am here to live my life out loud."**

Jesus would say for us to live life to the fullest; Zola says to live our lives out loud. What do you say? Ready to walk out on stage and live?

Have a great Sunday, and go in peace.  
Amen.