

Coram Deo  
Soli Deo Gloria, Soli Deo Gracia, Soli Scriptura  
Agnus Dei, Qui Tollis Peccata Mundi  
Deo Volente

Sermon Preached at Stouffville United Church

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# "From Serve-Us to Service

July 14, 2024

24<sup>th</sup> in Sermon Series

*<sup>13</sup> Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." <sup>14</sup> Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.* After the events of the attempted assassination of former president Trump, these words have been ever more meaningful. Whether you stand with Trump or Biden, Trudeau or Poilievre, it is never right to act in a manner that would end the life of one who is simply standing up for what they believe, whether we agree with it or not. Especially in a country like the USA or Canada where so many lives were given in the World Wars and since that time to secure the freedom of speech. For I remember a time when our soldiers were ordered to not wear their uniforms to the military bases across Canada – not out of fear of attack – but out of concern that they would be screamed at with statements like “Baby Killer” and have things thrown at them. And it was not so long ago our police who like our soldiers sought only to protect and to serve were hearing people scream “defund the police”

In a civil society we must always find a way to have discourse without vitriolic words or behaviors with someone is simply standing for what they believe.

James, who was martyred himself for simply standing up for what he believed, and the community of faith he was building, - who themselves had many tormented, harassed and martyred for doing the same - were our ancestors in faith. Theirs was about service not serving themselves. And James was seeking to encourage them to persevere and have patience, to respond in peace and grace. He said, “You know what is right. So do it.” And we find in the final words of James, his last encouragements and guidance.

## I

Firstly, **it is better to know what you want.** There is an old saying, “you can only fill an empty cup.” If you long for something it means it is missing. Yet, too often people fill their lives with things to deaden the longing rather than deal with it. *<sup>7</sup> Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. <sup>8</sup> Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts,*

A 5-year-old boy went to school on the first day at school, this little boy had one goal in life to have as much fun as possible. He was really excited and filled with apprehension being his first day at school but he was determined to have fun at all cost. His mother kissed him goodbye at the school gate and then she returned home to continue running the home. At lunch time there was a familiar knock at the door it was her son returning home, mother exclaimed “What are you doing here?” “I’ve quit school!” came the reply, “Why?” said mum,

“It’s too hard, too long, and too boring” replied the boy Mother retorted in love, “we need to get back on the bus you’ve just described life!”

The Rolling Stones once sang, “I can’t get no satisfaction.” Or the lyrics of U2 hit “I still haven’t found what I am looking for” both of which point to the longing of a generation and underline a deep rooted problem in our society, an endless quest for satisfaction in life. A hunger is evident for real meaningful satisfaction in life. Yet time and time again whatever people pour their energies into whether its fame – money – pleasure – possessions – people - yet even with all this there still appears to be a really lack of satisfaction in many people’s lives today. Freddie Mercury in one of his songs entitled, “Does anybody know what we’re living for?”

John Rockefeller once said, “I have made millions, but they have brought me no happiness. I would barter them all for the days I sat on an office stool in Cleveland and count myself rich on \$3 dollars a week.”

Victoria Wood “I’m terribly torn about being born. What is the whole thing about?”

Boris Becker said I had won Wimbledon twice before, once as the youngest player. I was rich. I had all the material possessions I needed; money, cars, women, everything. I know that this is a cliché. It’s the old song of the movie and pop stars who commit suicide. They have everything, and yet they are so un happy. I had no inner peace. I was a puppet on a string.” Kenneth Williams (found written in the Diary day after death.) “I wonder if anyone will know the emptiness of my life.”

Bob Geldof speaking after the suicide of former wife Paula Yates; said. “Life without love is pointless” He also said “There is this blank hole inside and it never goes away.” Kurt Cobain of Nirvana committed suicide and left a child and a wife the suicide note; April 8th 1994. “I can’t fool you, any one of you; it simply isn’t fair to you or me. The worst crime I can think of would be to rip people off by faking it, and pretending as if I am having 100% fun.” Princess Diana

said, “Being a princess is not all it’s cracked up to be.” Every one of them thought that what they got was what they wanted and found too late that it wasn’t. Yet, having filled their lives with these things they were unable to address the longing. It has been said, “You can only fill an empty cup.” And it is only after we empty ourselves of the things that we thought we were after will we ever find what we truly need. If you were to draw a breath and held it; would you be able to take another and another? Of course not. Our bodies have been created so that our bodies must expel one breath before taking another. Our lungs must make space for the new oxygen to come in and nourish our bodies. It is no different for our lives.

We are remarkably adept at filling our lives, our spaces and our time and leaving ourselves very little room to encounter and experience new and wondrous things.

## II

It is better to know what you want, and secondly, **it is better to want the right things than for wrong things.** Of all the hungers we have, it is only the hunger for righteousness – right things, that is pronounced blessed. Our biggest mistake is trying to satisfy spiritual hunger with physical things.

The solution to hunger is not to kill it, but to fill it. Our desires are not too strong, but too weak. C. S. Lewis said, "We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased." "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be *filled*."

After being interviewed by the school administration, the prospective teacher said: 'Let me see if I've got this right. 'You want me to go into that room with all those kids, correct their disruptive behavior, observe them for signs of abuse, monitor their dress habits, censor their T-shirt messages, and instill in them a love for learning. 'You want me to check their backpacks for weapons, wage war on drugs and sexually transmitted diseases, and raise their sense of self-esteem and personal pride. 'You want me to teach them patriotism and good citizenship, sportsmanship and fair play, and how to register to vote, balance a checkbook, and apply for a job. 'You want me to check their heads for lice, recognize signs of antisocial behavior, and make sure that they all pass the final exams. 'You also want me to provide them with an equal education regardless of their handicaps, and communicate regularly with their parents in English, Spanish or any other language, by letter, telephone, newsletter, and report card. 'You want me to do all this with a piece of chalk, a blackboard, a bulletin board, a few books, a big smile, and a starting salary that qualifies me for food stamps.

'You want me to do all this and then you tell me I can't pray!'" She knew what she needed.

### III

It is better to know what you want and it is better to want the right things and not the wrong things. And finally, it is **better to do what is right- and do it right now.**

*<sup>13</sup> Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." <sup>14</sup> Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.*

In Phoenix, Arizona, a 26-year-old mother stared down at her 6-year-old son, who was dying of terminal leukemia. Although her heart was filled with sadness, she also had a strong feeling of determination. Like any parent, she wanted her son to grow up & fulfill all his dreams. Now, that was no longer possible. The leukemia would see to that. But she still wanted her son's dream to come true. She took her son's hand and asked, 'Billy, did you ever think about what you wanted to be once you grew up? Did you ever dream and wish what you would do with your life?' Mommy, 'I always wanted to be a fireman when I grew up.' Mom smiled back and said, 'Let's see if we can make your wish come true.' Later that day she went to her local fire Department in Phoenix, Arizona, where she met Fireman Bob, who had a heart as big as Phoenix! She explained her son's final wish and asked if it might be possible to give her 6-year-old son a ride around the block on a fire engine. Fireman Bob said, 'Look, we can do better than that. If you'll have your son ready at seven o'clock Wednesday morning, we'll make him an honorary Fireman for the whole day. He can come down to the fire station, eat with us, go out on all the fire calls, the whole nine yards! And if you'll give us his sizes, we'll get a real fire uniform for him, with a real fire hat, not a toy one with the emblem of the Phoenix Fire Department on it, a yellow slicker like we wear and rubber boots.' 'They're all manufactured right here in Phoenix, so we can get them fast.'

Three days later Fireman Bob picked up Billy, dressed him in his uniform and escorted him from his hospital bed to the waiting hook and ladder truck. Billy got to sit on the back of the truck and help steer it back to the fire station. He was in heaven. There were three fire calls in Phoenix that day and Billy got to go out on all three calls. He rode in the different fire engines, the Paramedic's van, and even the fire chief's car. He was also videotaped for the <sup>[1]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>Local news program.

Having his dream come true, with all the love and attention that was lavished upon him, so deeply touched Billy that he lived three months longer than any doctor thought possible. One night all of his vital signs began to drop dramatically and the head nurse, who believed in the hospice concept; that

no one should die alone; began to call the family members to the hospital. Then she remembered the day Billy had spent as a Fireman, so she called the Fire Chief and asked if it would be possible to send a fireman in uniform to the hospital to be with Billy as he made his transition.

The chief replied, 'We can do better than that. We'll be there in five minutes. Will you please do me a favor? When you hear the sirens screaming and see the lights flashing, will you announce over the PA system that there is not a fire?' 'It's the department coming to see one of its finest members one more time. And will you open the window to his room?' About five minutes later a hook and ladder truck arrived at the hospital and extended its ladder up to Billy's third floor open window, 16 fire-fighters climbed up the ladder into Billy's room. With his mother's permission, they hugged him and held him and told him how much they loved him.

With his dying breath, Billy looked up at the fire chief and said, 'Chief, am I really a fireman now?' 'Billy, you are, and the Head Chief, Jesus, is holding your hand,' the chief said. With those words, Billy smiled and said, 'I know, He's been holding my hand all day, and the angels have been singing.' He closed his eyes one last time.

What are you after? One day your life will flash before your eyes. Make sure it is worth watching. You think about that. Amen.