

## ***Really Living***

Ecclesiastes 11:7 – 12:8

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Eventually, I am going to trot out a Science Fiction blockbuster as well as Austin Matthews, William Nylander, and Mitch Marner. But to get there, I have to start with death.

Today, after all, is Halloween Sunday, maybe. Or, perhaps All Saints Sunday, especially if you're an Anglican; or Day of the Dead, especially if you are a Roman Catholic in the Hispanic tradition. If you have Gaelic roots, you might think today is Samhain Sunday, a harvest feast that sings, "Winter's Coming!" Since the dawn of time, October's end has been associated with songs like, "How Far is Heaven," that our youth band Pancake Lunch just sang, because we all want to remember those who have passed away.

It is good to stop and think about death once in a while. We all need to prepare ourselves, after all. Besides, death—and especially young death—has been in the news lately.

The Russians and the Syrian Government are targeting school yards in Aleppo with snipers and mortars, so that nearly 30 children have died in those playgrounds over the past few weeks. We've all seen pictures of children who died trying to escape that war, or who barely survived after being buried in rubble. Two weeks ago four girls, aged ten through fourteen, committed suicide in Northern Saskatchewan communities. And Tori Stafford's killer was in the news this week again too.

But the truth is, it doesn't matter how old we are, there is no escaping death for any of us. From aging grandparents to occasional violence in our schools, from car accidents to serious diseases, we all face death.

So does the writer of Ecclesiastes. He—tradition says it was King Solomon, though that seems a bit of a stretch—anyway, the writer of Ecclesiastes also has a fascination with death—especially for its approach in older age. There is, for example, the poem in today's scripture. Did you catch all the allusions in it? Let's go through it for a minute.

### **Poem – Ecclesiastes 12:1-7**

Before the Sun and the light and the moon and stars are darkened and the clouds return with the rain **(The onset of life's end is a storm)**

On the day when the guards of the house tremble **(Arms)**

And the strong men are bent **(Legs)**

And the women who grind cease working because they are few (**Teeth**)

And those who look through the windows see dimly (**Eyes**)

When the doors of the street are shut (**Ears/Aroma**)

And the sound of grinding is low (**Teeth again, or perhaps lip-smacking due to the absence of teeth**)

And one rises up at the sound of a bird (**Sleep is easily disturbed**)

And all the daughters of song are brought low (**Changing voice, lower and raspy**)

When one is afraid of heights and terrors are in the road (**Unsteady on feet**)

The almond tree blossoms (**Grey hair**)

The grasshopper drags itself along (**Body stiff in the cool morning**)

And desire fails (**Sexual drive gone**)

And the silver cord is snapped (**Posture fails, bent**)

And the golden bowl is broken (**Senility**)

And the pitcher is broken at the fountain (**Incontinence**)

And the wheel broken at the cistern (**Heart Failure**)

And the dust returns to the earth as it was (**Death**)

It is a long poem. But notice that the writer of Ecclesiastes tells the riddling poem in the context of giving young people advice. Just before the poem, he tells young people to rejoice while you are young; to follow the inclinations—the dreams—of your hearts. And, says Solomon, young people should “remember your creator in the days of your youth.” In fact, that’s his antidote to death.

For Solomon, “remembering your creator in the days of your youth,” is making sure that your life has a depth dimension. We would call this a spirituality or religion or philosophy for living. Whether you are old and approaching the grave, or young and following the inclinations of your heart—do it with a depth dimension.

What I mean is this. Your life will be as flat as a glass of Pepsi left out on the table overnight, as flat as I would be if I auditioned for our church's choir, your life will be as flat as a tire with a three-inch rusty nail in it, if you don't find some depth.

We need depth. I'm a science fiction fan. The last Sci-fi book I read is by the new Chinese sensation, Cixin Liu. It's called "The Three-body Problem," and it won this year's Hugo prize, which means it was the best science fiction book written in the whole galaxy.

Anyway, at one point, the human solar system is under attack by Extraterrestrials. Their weapon is a two-dimensional trap. This trap has width and height—like a piece of paper or a cup or a pocket does; but no depth, like a box would have. Everything the trap touches slips from three dimensions into just two. As you can imagine, that squeezes the life out of our solar system. Everything with volume, everything juicy and huggable and playable is now as flat and dead as an expired Driver's License.

But that is how it is for us too. What the writer of Ecclesiastes is trying to do is use death—the inevitability of old age, with all of its attendant troubles—the writer of Ecclesiastes is trying to use the certainty of death as a lure to encourage his readers to hang onto the depth dimension of life. Don't measure your life by its length—by how long you live; nor by its width—how rich you get. That's two-dimensional life. No, for life to matter, for life to be worth it, for life to be really crazy and wonderful, says Solomon, it needs a depth dimension. So, "Remember your creator in the days of your youth."

You need a depth dimension. Toronto Maple Leafs' new young stars: Marner, Nylander, and Matthews, don't just have talent. They set their alarm clocks so that they don't miss practice. They stay after practice to work a little bit harder and longer on what counts. They voluntarily sign up for daily weight training in the off season. They live with parents instead of at party houses. *And* they have that something extra, eyes on the back of their head, hockey sense, a mind-meld with their team-mates. These young hockey players are not merely raw talent; they have a depth dimension.

Listen. If you are young, I am here today to say that life is short—much shorter than you could ever know when you are twelve or fifteen or even twenty. As with all things that are in limited supply, when things are short, they're precious. Your life is precious. This is your one chance to live life not as a something thin, like the soup broth fed to you when you have a fever; no this is your one chance to live a life as deep as the Pacific Ocean's Marianas Trench, as amazing as a journey to the next star system, as rich as the love of King David for Israel's Prince Jonathon. So what is this depth I've been pushing?

Well, here, in this church, we do deep by grounding ourselves in the life and teachings of Jesus. Depth here is as easy as loving your neighbour, and as hard as turning the other cheek or giving the coat off of your back. It's the stuff that Stevie Wonder sings about in the song Pancake Lunch is going to do after this sermon:

Lovers keep on lovin'  
Believers keep on believin'  
Sleepers just stop sleepin'  
'Cause it won't be too long  
Oh no

It won't be too long before the women who grind stop working, and the almond tree blooms, and all our dust returns to the earth. But believe me—till then, a focus on the depth dimension that following Jesus' path of loving others adds to any life, a fierce focus on the other, this living in the world not as a raw talent but as someone with eyes for justice and compassion and mercy in the back of your head—this is really living.

That is deep.