

SUNDAY 7 JULY 2024

REFLECTION: Rev Craig Kilgour

The Good Life

Just over a year ago I celebrated my 80th birthday and I spent a lot of time thinking about what I would say to family and friends. This is briefly what I said.

I was grateful I had reached this age. I have had a wonderful life. Sure, there have been times of deep-down sadness. I've travelled widely, had the most wonderful adventures and experiences and met the most amazing people.

I'm grateful for family. For my parents families. My mum came out from Scotland as a young woman with her extended family. I grew up among broad Scottish accents. Many worked on the waterfront, freezing works and woollen mills. My dad's family were a rowdy, competitive, argumentative lot. I think some of that rubbed off on me. I have 28 cousins.

Grateful for my own family. For my boys and their partners and of course my 4 grandchildren. I think of families who invited me to join theirs over the years and that is very special. I think of partners and their families.

Family encompasses a lot of people.

I'm grateful for wonderful friends down through the years who have got me through difficult times and got me a flying again.

I'm grateful for the church, that gifted me a university education and theological training. 3 wonderful parishes over 36 years. 2 overseas exchanges to Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania USA and Oxted south of London. 2 sabbaticals, Trinity Theological College in Singapore and Westminster College in Cambridge UK.

Also grateful for a little fluff ball of a dog called Paris, a constant companion for nearly 9 years.

I was overflowing with gratitude for the life I've had, and I hope many of you can say the same. I'm also aware that some of your lives may have really been tough and yet you have made the most of them.

We all need to practice gratitude.

I liked this quote by M Chernoff, " No amount of regret changes the past. No amount of anxiety changes the future. But any amount of gratitude changes the present, "

Many years back I enjoyed the comedy series on TV called The Good Life. Some may remember it. Tom and Barbara Good want to give up the rat race and live a life of simplicity and self-sufficiency. They convert their suburban home into a farm, planting crops and bringing in pigs and chickens including a rooster called Lenin. The new use of their property comes as something of a shock to their very proper neighbours, Margo and Jerry Leadbetter. A social climber of the first order, Margo can't bear having chickens roaming in the back garden. Still, she has to put up with it though, since Tom, despite his desire for self-sufficiency, can't bring himself to kill the chickens. The actors were Felicity Kendal, Richard Briers, Penelope Keith and Paul Eddington.

The question is how much do you need to have a good life? I am certainly grateful for what I have. What does the scriptures say about the Good Life?

This morning, think about the Sermon on the Mount. A blueprint of Jesus's teaching. There is nothing about what to believe but how we should treat others. Happy or blessed are those who realize their need. Those who mourn because they have loved. Those who are humble and do what God requires of them. Those who are merciful and live upright lives. Those who are peacemakers and so on.

Ecclesiastes basically says enjoy the life you have been given and be grateful. The only pleasure in life is good food and a glass of wine.

I have always liked Colossians 3 v 12.

So then you must clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Be tolerant with one another and forgive one another. To all these add love which binds all things together in perfect unity. And be thankful. That is a very brief outline.

I've always enjoyed English humour. The Goon Show, Black Adder, Fawlty Towers etc and Monty Python who weren't afraid to poke fun at even religion in the Life of Brian. In 1983 there was a Monty Python movie titled The Meaning of Life in which Michael Palin opens the envelope that contains the answer to the movies question, and informs the viewers saying, "Well its nothing very exciting or special. Try to be nice to people, avoid eating fat, read a good book every now and then, get some walking in and try to live together in peace and harmony with people of all creeds and nations. "

I like that. One thing that is funny about this is that it really isn't very special and yet there is also something profound about it.

Be nice to people. We are living in a world of growing anger and hate, fake news, conspiracy theories, most on social media where people can stay anonymous. Shop staff, road workers, medical staff abused accompanied with threats of violence. Former PM Jacinda Ardern called for everyone to be kind to one another during the pandemic and after the Christchurch Mosque shootings and think of the abuse she received. Be nice. Even Christians can be nasty to one another. I've been in congregations when there have been disputes that turned nasty. I liked the comment, Be kind, everyone is carrying something heavy.

Don't eat too much fat, get some walking in. Look after your body. I think many of us are doing better. A few months back a friend said 'Craig I think you would benefit going to Mainly Balance exercise group at our church each Tuesday.' I've never been to an exercise group in my life, and I also don't like being told what to do. But I go and thoroughly enjoy it. We have lots of fun. There are some things I struggle with, but I think I'm improving.

Read a good book every now and then. I have no trouble curling up and reading a good book for hours, it's probably why I need more exercise. Do some enjoyable and interesting things occasionally. Several months back Helen asked if I would like to go to the Ballet? I have never been to a Ballet in my life. I said yes and I was blown away with the beauty, athleticism, staging and music. We will be going soon to see Swan Lake. That will be my 4th evening of Ballet. Helen also asked if I would like to go to WOW in Wellington. I asked is that the crazy outfits one. Again, I was blown away. It was a visual extravaganza, and I can see why thousands go. It is never too late to do something interesting.

And finally live in peace and harmony with all creeds and nations. Again, we live in a world with many wars in progress. In Ukraine, Gaza, Sudan to mention just a few. We have just remembered ANZAC day, when we recalled the millions, who are different. You and I are called to be a blessing to one another, to be bearers of Shalom and reconciliation.

Shalom is a word that means much more than the absence of war and violence, putting things right, making things whole. It is about fullness and completeness. It is wishing an inward sense of wholeness and wellbeing on others. It is about justice.

So let us be nice to people, avoid eating fat, read a good book every now and then, get some walking in and try to live together in peace and harmony with peoples of all creeds and nations.