

# Saint Andrew's Episcopal Church

Lake Worth, Florida

The Eve of Easter VII [May 7, 2005]

Canon Richard T. Nolan

## “GET A (CHRISTIAN) LIFE!”

*(Reflections on being an everyday, uncomplicated Christian)*

### *The Directive*

We are likely to hear rather frequently the disapproving directive “Get a life!” hurled at various targets. When you and I perceive others’ behaviors as wasteful, obsessed, self-defeating, stagnant, too restricted or otherwise inadequate, we might at least *think* these words. We are less likely to realize that the same command could be tossed in our directions as well. A genuinely sufficient life, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder.

Many of Jesus’ teachings are in the “get a life” category. In his godly view, individuals and groups with whom he came into contact, even his own followers, were living unnecessarily diminished lives. To him, many of their lives were clearly deficient, obsessive, self-defeating, stagnant, or just plain evil.

### *Eternal Life Can Begin Now.*

In the portion of Jesus’ poetic prayer heard tonight from John’s Gospel, Jesus refers to our acquiring eternal life. Here he is not referring just to “the next life,” but to the fulfilled life that can begin whenever we choose it.

### *“Christian Life” Often Repulsive*

Of course, living a Christian life can sound like an overwhelming, mystifying, off-putting challenge. Christian living can come across as a lengthy list of imprisoning, unreasonable moral demands; or, as too many peculiar, doctrinal certainties with little credibility; or, as lengthy, fussy liturgies; and, as fanatical mean-spiritedness, cultivated arrogance, and willful ignorance. Furthermore, one can easily get the impression that Christianity is for individuals who reject their responsibilities and expect God to do almost everything for them, or for people looking for magical resolutions to all problems, or for those folks who enjoy wallowing in emotional masochism. Indeed, one can experience all of these traits among the Christianities seen on television, invoked in contemporary politics, and pursued within local, national, and international ecclesiastical bodies. An invitation to become a Christian may sound just too otherworldly and complicated. The label “Christian” itself has become repulsive to many good people and even alien to the New Testament portraits of Christ.

### *Christian Life as Persons-In-Relation*

Different from what we often run into as the “Christian life,” there is a profound yet uncomplicated, life-affirming Christianity, a Way of life for ordinary people like ourselves. *This* Christianity is lived, not in isolation, but as persons-in-relation, individuals who try to balance *self-regard* with *equal regard* for others. We are invited to share a Way of life in which joy accommodates sorrow, trust overrides suspicion, and mutuality rejects both self-neglect and self-centeredness.

You and I know well that at certain critical times we are caught in circumstances when others must come first, times of imbalance - when our own self-regard is rightly eclipsed by others’ needs. We see this dramatically represented in Jesus’ life when he paid the ultimate price of his own unjust execution because he chose to serve God with perfect commitment. Likewise, there are vital times when our own needs are rightly given priority. Recall the times when Jesus went off by himself to pray and to be refreshed. I cannot recall any mention of Jesus becoming drained from excessive busyness, because he tended to his own needs as well as the needs of others.

## *Christian Life as Community*

A Christian life also involves the gathering of Christ's followers to pray, reflect, share genuine fellowship, and to promote justice. In community, we revere the awesome Creator of the Universe; we contemplate God's purposes for humanity as we listen carefully to the Word of God beneath the words of Scripture. We open ourselves to God's Spirit who, like a heavenly Mother, comforts us, strengthens us to cope, and heals our spirits.

Christian living incorporates our individual and corporate love for God expressed by our trust in God, by showing reverence for God, and by being ultimately loyal to the Creator alone. To love God faithfully is to live from moment to moment with grace-filled hearts and minds and by carefully making the multitude of decisions the Creator entrusts to us. To love God is also to live with gratitude; with awe; with penitence, and with acts of justice.

A Christian life entails participation in the community of believers who witness to God's intentions as made known in Christ - despite the suffering that can result. Surely, suffering just for the sake of suffering has no merit. However, individuals and churches will often find themselves in conflict with the loyalties and values of the secular world. Each person and each congregation is called upon to accept persecution to the extent that their consciences dictate. In such times, God's Spirit will help us endure, and eventually – perhaps not in our own time - God's Will shall prevail.

You and I know well that faithful Christians differ on many matters. No one has infallible access to the mind of God; we must engage in much heartfelt, prayerful thought as we pursue love and justice. The agreement to differ on these matters, as well as on many matters of doctrine, is of vital importance. If I support abortion in some situations and you oppose it under all circumstances, in a spirit of humility we can still find unity in our acts of worship together. Agreeing to differ, we might vigorously pursue the legalization of our respective moral convictions while maintaining our sense of Christian community.

### *An Invitation to "Get A Life"*

If I were to design an invitation to an uncomplicated Christian life for us ordinary people, it would be something like this:

*You are cordially invited to participate in a community of diverse people who gather regularly to worship and know the Creator as disclosed to us through the biblical writers - particularly the Hebrew prophets, and especially through the life and teachings of Jesus. Our goals are to nurture fulfilled lives; to promote justice, peace, and love for all; to support each other in joy and suffering; to continue to grow in love, knowledge, and wisdom; and, to agree to differ among ourselves while maintaining bonds of mutual affection. RSVP St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Lake Worth, Florida*

When Jesus calls us to "get a life," he wants only the best for us. As we wander now and then into lesser lives, it is in places like this gathering tonight that you and I can "get a life" – again and again.

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### **The Readings**

**1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11**

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you.

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you. Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your

**adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters in all the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering. And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the power forever and ever. Amen.**

#### **John 17:1-11**

**Jesus looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.**

**"I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. "**