

“All There Is”
Romans 8:5-11, 12:1-3
Luke 4:5-8, 9:23-27, 12:22-24

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You may be enjoying a really good meal, but soon it's all gone. Is that all there is?

A new electronic device might be really cool, but after a while the novelty wears off. Is that all there is?

Sometimes when you go to an event, it's incredibly wonderful and then it's over. Is that all there is?

The question I came with this morning was, “Is that all there is?” The things of life... is that all there is?

And what about who you and I are? There has been a lot of work in science and philosophy. Sometimes it's suggested that who we are is basically a bunch of atoms that are put together. Is that all there is? It's suggested at times that we are just made up of all these pieces and parts and that if we just knew how those pieces and parts fit together we would know everything about us. In fact, if we knew how all those pieces and parts work, then we could predict what everybody would do. Is that all there is?

I've struggled with that. Can we reduce ourselves to pieces and parts? Is it all determined? And not only that, but then science suggests a way to think about everything – very logically, deductively. Sometimes it feels like the ideal is to be Spock, if you remember who Spock is, to live that very logical life. But really, who wants to live that life? Is that all there is?

In some ways, I think this term “postmodernism” that is flung around sometimes these days is a reaction to that very thought. Is that all there is? No, we've got to free ourselves from that way of thinking. We've got to free ourselves from all those descriptions of who we are, the narratives of our lives that keep us contained and overpower us, and look at where that power lies. And what does it leave us with? It leaves me with a lot of confusion. And you read some of those guys and it leaves them with something called nihilism. There is really nothing, so you don't have to care about anything, basically. Is that all there is? It's not my experience. There's more to life. It's not just about power and constraints.

And then there's this suggestion that I'm supposed to make something of myself. Do I take these parts and try to fit them together? How do I do that? The skeptics say that since it's all laid out in science in this particular way and we can't really know what's coming, and we don't know what's behind us, and we don't know if it's going to be the same tomorrow as it was today, we don't really know anything. Is that all there is? They say, basically then, that we just have fun. I really think that's a direct root of the

theme of some of society, which we might call sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll. Is that all there is?

When the devil came to Jesus and said, "You can have all of this—the world and its things— if you don't worship or serve God," Jesus said, "No, I think there is more than all that. I will worship and serve God alone." There is something more. Even science today is recognizing that perhaps there are more than just the pieces. There are systems that actually have some kind of life of their own that affects the parts they are made up of. It feels to me like they are catching up. They are catching up with something that scripture has told us for eons.

We have various terms for it in scripture, and you have to put them all together. We hear about God breathing the breath of life into us at the beginning—this *ruach* of God and then we have what we call the *nephesh* in the Hebrew side of things. Then if you look at the Greek side of things, there are other terms for being alive, but as Jesus begins to talk about what it means to be alive, he's using a term that is the root of the word psychology or psyche—*psuché*. Sometimes we translate that as soul, but I think he's getting at something more than that. It's more than the food we eat; it's more than the clothes we wear. It's more than the things we have, this life that is available to us, this *psuché*. It's more than that. In faith, I think we're opened and guided to recognize it's not all there is, it's that there's more than we might have expected. We really see that with our own lives. It's not just that we do a particular thing, we have a feeling that goes along with it. We have thoughts that may help us see things in new ways. We have experiences.

Sometimes, as we try to work our way through life, we try to define things and control them by knowing about them. So there's this one philosopher who gave this example. He suggests that sometimes we know things that we don't have to pull apart. For example, if I ask you to go open the door, you would know exactly what I was saying, right? But if I'm pretty sure you don't understand what I really mean, I'll describe it. I want you to get up out of your seat, I want you to walk from here to there, and I want you to push that long rectangular thing open. We don't need to do that. We already know what it means to open the door. The details actually make it more confusing.

There's some of that struggle when we say, "What is our life?" We have an idea what it is, but it's really hard to define. That's because it is so much more than the very pieces that make it up. Jesus goes on to suggest that one of the struggles we have is that we think that we can circle the wagons around our soul to make it safe and thereby grow it by getting the things we need and bringing them inside the circle of our wagons. Jesus is saying, "You must lose your life in order to find it." What he's pointing us toward, I believe, is that we have the ability as we grow not only to grow physically from children into adults, but there's a way our lives grow up as well, and they don't stop growing. Our lives keep developing, or can. I think when we try to circle the wagons around them we begin to constrict and go the other way.

I don't know about you, but I have had experience with folks who I feel like are on both sides of that perspective. There are people who I've been around who seem to be a little dry, like things are withering. And then I've been around people – and they don't have to be physically big – but their life seemed huge and to be around them felt wonderful.

Think about how what God is inviting us to do is to let go of trying to form our *psuché*, our life, by ourselves because it doesn't work. Jesus says we have to let go. "Pick up your cross and follow me," is what he says. It feels like a sacrifice, a letting go of my life to follow Jesus. Then, he says, life really grows.

Just as we need food to grow up, to feed our bodies, we need ways to feed our souls, to feed our life that it might grow. It is following Jesus and serving. Or, as he said to the devil, worshiping God and serving him. In that, he is inviting us to find the fullness and wonder of life. Notice that as we do that there is a spirit that God gives us that nourishes, encourages, guides.

That's a wonderful thing, but there is a lot more to life than the end of a meal or a new electronic gadget or any one experience. It is as we follow Christ and open ourselves to the Spirit that we are opening to the work God will do in us instead of shutting down away from it. God is inviting us to live that life forward, to find out where and how God is going to expand our life and what we are to become.

I don't know about you, but I've certainly experienced those times when I have felt fearful, worried, trying to make sure I got what I needed, and so often just caused problems, made my life worse. It's when I trust that whatever the problem is and however hard it may be to get through it that God is with me that I begin to notice the light. I begin to recognize in the midst of pain and struggle, moments of beauty and wonder. It's incredible how God can expand our lives at the very moments we feel we are being contracted.

So it is that as we open our lives to the Spirit, as Paul says, the Spirit will work in us, guiding us, giving us life. So often I hear that Christianity is about a constriction of life, but I don't think so at all. Following Christ is about finding the fullness and wonder and glory of life. Thank God. Amen.

Lord, help us see that the answer to our question, "Is there anything else?" is yes, there is. If we turn to you, you will begin to fill us, to expand the fullness of our lives. Lord, we don't always quite have the fullness of trust and assurance we need. Help us recognize that we can trust you, that we can follow Christ, and that you will expand our lives. You will give us a fullness of life, and it is as we follow you that you give us life. Through Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.