DATE: November 15th, 2026
TEXT: Psalm 90:1-6, 12
THEME: Life is short, so sing.
SUBJECT: Uncertainty of life, Certainty in God
TITLE: Numbering Our Days Aright

Main question: How shall we live life?

Prayer: Gracious and loving God, fill our minds with your Word and help us to be curious. Increase our love for one another, and inspire us with a commitment to create a transformed world, starting with ourselves. Amen.

How would you finish this phrase: Life is short, so _____. Life is short, so make as much money as you can, keeping some and giving some away? Life is short, so work toward the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people (Jeremy Bentham). Life is short, so live it up!

Do you remember the song by Tom Cochrane way back in 1991 called *Life is a Highway*? The first line goes:

> "Life's like a road that you travel on
> When there's one day here and the next day gone"

That's a major theme in Psalm 90. Life <u>is</u> short; here today, gone tomorrow. I took the title of this sermon from the words, "make us realize how short life is" or, as the NIV says, "Teach us to number our days aright." The following words appear two verses earlier: "The length of our days is seventy years — or eighty, if we have the strength; yet their span is but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away." I like the way King James puts it: "The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away." Abraham Lincoln may have taken

his cue from this verse when he spoke iconic words at Gettysburg in 1863: “Fourscore and seven years ago …”

Knowing that life is short — though sometimes it feels long (the days go by slowly, but the years go by fast) — how shall we live? *Since life is so short, maybe we should take all we can get*. We’ve got a limited amount of time, so perhaps it’s best to fill that time with the accumulation of wealth and material excess. Why not? It’s a pretty popular choice. If we’re here today and gone tomorrow, why not live it up?

In Ancient Greece, there were plenty of people who thought like that. Two schools of philosophy, the Epicureans and the Stoics, arose in opposition to that kind of thinking, arguing that such lavish living has some serious downsides. The Epicureans promoted a calm and simple lifestyle — avoiding pain whenever possible. *Life is short, so keep it simple and pain-free*. The Stoics focused only on what they could control — their own thoughts and choices — and they let go of what they could not control — other people’s actions and opinions. *Life is short, so examine yourself*. These two philosophies continue to influence Christian behavior today in those who try to live as simply as possible, who ground their actions in daily self-examination, who accept life as it comes and see hardship as fuel for growth and character building. Stoicism, in particular, acknowledged how short life is and encouraged people to live with a sense of urgency and clarity of purpose. Urgency about how we should spend our time may have weighed upon people even more in earlier times when average lifespans were much shorter than they are now. From ancient times until about 1800, it’s estimated that people could expect to live between 20 and 40 years old. Our psalmist today — perhaps only a child — was clearly feeling the pressure of time when he or she wrote

the words, “You [O God] sweep us away like a dream, fleeting as the grass that springs up in the morning.” Jesus was around 33 years old by the time he set in motion theological and spiritual changes that have profoundly affected the world, even 2000 years later; by age 30, Alexander the Great created one of the largest empires in history up to that time; Joan of Arc led troops to great victories at age 19; Mary Shelly wrote Frankenstein at age 18; and most of our nation’s founders were under 40 years old. By the early 1900s, the average lifetime in the world had increased to 32 years. Due to modern medicine, better nutrition and cleaner water, the average global life expectancy now hovers around 73 years. (*Our World in Data* website). This year in the U.S., lifetimes are as long as they’ve ever been: on average, we now have the strength to live close to 80 years (*CDC National Center for Health Statistics*).

So, how shall we number our days aright? How shall we finish the phrase: Life is short, so _____? Life is short, so live it up? Life is short, so keep it simple? Life is short, so examine yourself? Maybe this: *Life is short, so what’s the use?* Many young people have been deeply impacted by the pandemic, a meteoric rise in the cost of living, and seemingly fewer opportunities for future success. They may be wondering, “Why even try?” Is going to college worth the cost? Will AI take all the jobs away? Will the world completely fall apart economically, environmentally and politically in the coming decades? I grew up with the constant threat of nuclear annihilation, but it seems different now. It felt (to me) like there was still a path forward. I didn’t doubt that I’d be able to get a job. I didn’t doubt that I could afford to raise children. I was reasonably confident that I might one day afford an apartment or perhaps own a house. I wonder how many young people today doubt these basic assumptions.

If there's any book in the Bible that wonders "what's the point?" it's the book of Ecclesiastes. A quick skim of the sub-titles paints a picture of someone who seems to have given up: *Pleasures are meaningless. Toil is meaningless. Advancement is meaningless. Riches are meaningless. <u>Everything</u> is meaningless*. Nothing can truly satisfy or give joy because it's all meaningless. Perhaps some who wonder "what's the point?" and say, "It's all meaningless" will take comfort in the fact that people have been uttering these words in challenging times for thousands of years. But I wonder if they've read beyond those words to the end of the book. Before getting to the conclusion of that book, however, there are some great quotes along the way: "There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven." (Ecc 3:1) "The race is not to the swift or the battle to the strong, nor does food come to the wise or wealth to the brilliant or favor to the learned; but time and chance happen to them all." (Ecc. 9:11) In the end, the author doesn't give in to reckless accumulation of wealth, nor hope in a painless life, nor wallow in self-defeat. Here's the final word from Ecclesiastes: "Fear God and keep God's commandments."

The psalmist says something similar, but with a twist: *Life is short, so sing because God's in charge*. Here's Psalm 90:2,12 & 14: "Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God. … Teach us to number our days aright [O Lord], that we may gain a heart of wisdom. … Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days." Both Ecclesiastes and the psalmist ultimately turn to God for hope. Life is uncertain. We don't know what the world will look like in 10 years, 5 years … next year! We don't know what we'll be able to afford? We don't know how many

species of plants and animals will survive the next 100 years. We don't know the length of our days. But understanding that we don't know … that's wisdom. This is wisdom too: though we don't know how many days we have on this earth, each day is a gift and we ought to live each one well. God doesn't need us to accomplish great and impressive things — though that may happen by God's grace. Our job is to trust God who has laid the foundations of the earth and will be around long after those foundations cave in; our job is also to love our neighbor, and to live life as God has called us to live. For, as Paul writes in Ephesians, "I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." (Eph 4:1-3)

Life will deal its bad hand and challenges will come. When that happens, I pray that you may live life in wellness. Life is short, so — and here I'll quote another song — "Dance like no one is watching, sing like no one is listening, and love like you have never been hurt." (*Come from the Heart*, Susanna Clark and Richard Leigh, 1987).

Benediction

Life is short

and we do not have much time to gladden the hearts of those who travel the way with us.

So be swift to love.

Make haste to be kind.

And may the peace of Christ, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds today, tomorrow, and down all our days.