

September 28, 2025

Rev. Mike Eller

“The Good Life”

1 Timothy 6:6-19

What does the good life look like? That seems to be the question of our time.

I was a child of the '80s. And as a young person, I was into sports, particularly football. If you don't know much about professional football, there was *one* team that ruled most of that decade—the San Francisco 49ers, sorry Dallas Cowboys fans. Winners of 5 Super Bowls in the span of 14 years. Joe Montana, Jerry Rice, John Taylor. They were the team to watch!

I grew up a big 49ers fan. Jim Harbaugh was the coach of the team over a decade ago. And I used to love how he led locker room celebrations following a win.

At the end of his post game speech, Coach Harbaugh would lead everyone in a loud, call-and-response liturgy:

He would say: “Who’s got it better than us?” And the whole team yelled in unison: “Nobody!”

“Who’s got it better than us?” “Nobody!”

As a fan, looking on, you felt like you were part of THE ONLY team—that you were in the center of that sweaty, raucous liturgical moment, and if you didn't respond in voice through the television set, you did in heart.

I sometimes think about those chants and wonder...

....If we are honest with ourselves, if I'm honest with myself, that most days when we wake up, there are people we are grateful, even relieved, just to not be...

...That there are people we look to in order to establish a sense of being in the right and on the right side.

Nobody has it better than us!

Now, a vital aspect of being a community of radical belonging is a posture of vulnerability, so I'm going to ask you to practice some openness and confession, and by a show of hands: that if you're honest with yourself, most mornings you wake up with immense gratitude that you are not a dreaded Yankees fan. Or instead maybe you thank God you're not a Mets fan.

Some of you, most mornings you wake up, and if you're honest with yourself, you are grateful that you're not a fan of those Philadelphia Eagles or the lowly New York Giants. God, please help the Giants win some games this year!

To this day, I still cannot root for the Dallas Cowboys from those decades of bitter rivalry with my team back in the 80's and 90's. And if I'm honest, some of that disdain carries over even to fans of the team.

I wake up and thank God I'm not a Cowboy's fan.

Now if that's you this morning, just know that with therapy I've come a long way and I'm able to see your humanity again.

You see, I believe, that we as people harness within ourselves an intuition, and even make explicit, a sense of rightness according to other people being on the wrong side of that.

And to lean a bit more into that vulnerability: if we're honest, we do this as a church too, don't we? Grateful that we're not one of those Methodists, or a Baptist, or those holy rollers of that Pentecostal church just down the street. And to be sure, those congregations are thinking the same thing about us: Grateful that I'm not one of the frozen chosen of the Presbyterian Church.

Maybe we wake up and we're thankful that we are not a Republican. But, oh, we know we are right on so many levels!

Yet as those insulated walls of our team's locker room grow increasingly thick, and the chants, of our team's superiority, grow even louder,

...We are reminded that pursuing *rightness* was never the call. It is righteousness that govern our being in this world. And there's a difference between the two.

In our New Testament reading this morning, Paul admonishes the young Timothy to shun the economy of gain—a system in which others must lose—and pursue righteousness.

Righteousness is life lived in a different economy, where the currency is of values that have eternal worth.

In his letter, he writes: "But as for you, person of God, shun all this; pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness."

"Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called."

For all the enjoyment that is playing on a sports team, and rooting for *your* team, our obsession with competition has done us a disservice as humans on this planet. We have turned life itself into a competitive sport—and it's a zero-sum game for many. I can only win if others lose.

In the rules of that game, we bolster our team's image and chances of winning by creating strong boundaries.

Some call that the good life.

"Who's got it better than us?..."

The message for us today is to see a much wider vision of the good life, what is folded into the call to pursue righteousness.

A few nights ago, our family was at a quinceanera party on the rooftop of our building. The party was being thrown by friends of ours who live on our hall. And their daughter, who had turned 15, had a bunch of her school friends at the party.

As the night was winding down, I headed down on the elevator to go to our apartment and one of the teenage friends was on the elevator with me along with a couple of others.

She was on the phone with her mom, letting her know she was leaving the party, when her phone died in the elevator, mid-conversation.

She recognized me immediately from the party and asked if she could use my phone. I said, of course.

At that moment, I realized she was in a different part of town, late at night, needing to get an Uber, with no way to book the Uber or communicate with her mom. And my parental instincts immediately kicked in.

Without hesitation, I waited with her while she contacted her mom using my phone, who booked the Uber for her and texted me the information. Then I made sure she could get into the Uber safely and messaged her mom with all the updates along the way.

Things I would have done if she was my own child.

This instinct is a small illustration to get at a larger principle of what Peter Singer, an Australian philosopher, calls “Maximizing goodness impartially.”

You and I feel this every time we learn of those in another part of our world that are in need and we do what we can to help them, even though we’ve never met them—strangers, really.

To see the whole world as part of your circle of concern and care... to welcome the stranger as your neighbor, even your extended family, this is part of what it means to live in righteousness.

This is what Jesus meant when he said: to follow him, one must leave his father and mother. He wasn’t diminishing what it means to be family, he was expanding it—extending the human family to one without limits or borders.

He was dismantling tribalistic mentality.

The good life is overcoming the lure of egoism, of making yourself, or your clan, the center and only tree in the forest.

How narrow to view life in such a way!

The good life is to see that the whole world is your forest.

Yet we know how much easier it is to be that center and lone tree.

For Paul, that is the sin of the economy of accumulation—of gain at the expense of other people’s loss.

He warns: “the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.”

My brothers and sisters, and gender-fluid siblings: The church must operate by a different economy if it is to carry out its mission of transforming this world through radical love and justice.

If we’re honest, we can be some of the most tribal-minded, boundary-keeping, communities.

Will the church continue to be measured by the metrics of this world?

GDP stands for Gross Domestic Product. It is a metric that measures a country's total economic output. Over a specific period, it considers the market value of all goods and services produced within a country's borders. This metric is the main indicator of a country’s economic size, health, and growth.

Bhutan is a small country situated in the Eastern Himalayas between China to the north and India to the south.

In 2008, the government of Bhutan rejected the GDP as a measure of its progress and instead developed and put into practice the GNH—Gross National Happiness—which would guide their policies and be a measure of its health and growth.

This other metric took into question how all of its citizens were being impacted based on the values of a different economy.

How it went about its consumption of use of resources—was it beneficial for all?

This resistance to be measured by economic growth and sustainability is a reframing in our time of what it looks like to live the good life.

For a country, for a church, for an individual.

The good life maximizes goodness impartially. It is being a giver. It is self-sacrificial all the way down.

Paul says, it's the way we "take hold of the life that really is life."

The challenge to us is really one of vision. How big is your forest?

I think our default is to have a shrinking forest. It will take the daily work of keeping that expansion project going.

It is counter-cultural and counter-intuitive: It is the upside-down way of God's eternal kin-dom.

Who's got it better than us—every single one of us? Nobody!

That's the good news of the Gospel. Amen.