

Proper 14 (19) - August 10, 2025

Ezekiel 14:12–22a; Psalm 124:1–8; Hebrews 11:29–12:2; Luke 17:26–37

”A life of faith, in real time”

1. Human beings: we are social creatures. We like to share our lives with one another, whether we’re shy or outgoing, these days whether tech savvy or not.
  - a. Even before social media, people shared stories of their lives, caught up with one another
    - i. It was at family reunions or Sunday dinner
    - ii. It was through letters or phone calls home from college
  - b. Today because of social media and technology, the sharing is more instantaneous and constant
    - i. Maybe we overshare on social media – letting people into tiny details of our lives
    - ii. Whether you use Facebook or Instagram, whether you use X or Bluesky, you get to share your life, your thoughts with your closest friends... or perfect strangers!
  - c. On Facebook, I am connected with family, friends and acquaintances across the US and Mexico and as far away as Spain, South Africa and Japan.
  - d. And they all know about our family’s #donutthursday
    - i. They know because we’ve been posting about it for about eight years.
    - ii. Our Donut Thursdays started when we’d drive the boys to high school, and as a treat, we’d stop at the then new donut shop near us, Donut Central.
    - iii. Quick donut, quick selfie, and it was off to school and work.
    - iv. But like I said, that was years ago.
    - v. The boys have long ago finished high school, but Tracy and I still get our donuts Thursdays.
    - vi. Even when we travel, because it is now a tradition, we have to pause and look for a donut shop on Thursdays.
    - vii. We have people who follow us on Facebook who remark about Donut Thursdays, who know my favorite donut (Maple Bacon).
    - viii. We get donut themed presents: ornaments, mugs, socks, donuts
    - ix. Even got this knit version of my Maple Bacon from Jen!
  - e. Some people find it annoying how much people broadcast their lives on social media, recording and commenting on everything they buy or eat.
    - i. Some do it because there is money to be made.
    - ii. The son of a friend of mine makes nearly six figures from his YouTube show where he reviews movies with a buddy every other week.

- iii. They have subscribers who pitch in a few dollars to keep them on the air.
  - f. Of course, in some ways the lives we see on social media aren't really real.
    - i. Forget the filters and the selective pictures, I'm talking about the full ups and downs of a person's life. We may not see those on Instagram
    - ii. It's rare to see the vulnerability to express oneself fully, how one is really feeling / doing, without caring how others would react (or whether your subscribers would decide to cancel their subscription).
- 2. In today's bible passages, we hear snippets of people's lives shared, in an old fashioned way of storytelling, very summarized
  - a. There are passing references to narratives of common and prominent lives being lived by faithful people
    - i. In the Hebrews passage we get past stories, and in the Gospel both old and the prospect of future stories
    - ii. In the Gospel passage Jesus is speaking of a decisive moment, a time when living out one's faith would be a turning point.
    - iii. That in contrast or in reference to older turning points, like when he talks about the story of the flood, or the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah when people were caught unaware of the need for change.
    - iv. In Hebrews the brief descriptions are of those who faced their particular challenges, their turning points, and their faithfulness through it all.
  - b. The stories are being shared so we can be encouraged and inspired by the lives of the faithful,
    - i. we get to think about what a life of faith may look like.
    - ii. You and I have stories (our own or of people near to us) which we turn to, whether as the positive lessons learned or cautionary tales.
    - iii. Jesus offers stark advice for when people come to those turning points in life:
      1. Try to save your "life" as you know it – and you risk losing it.
      2. Let yourself risk not holding on so tightly to what your life is, and you'll actually save it.
      3. And about those images of one person taken and one person left, forget the interpretation of the Left Behind series – I'm glad to talk to you about it some other time.
      4. Try this on for size: Ethical / faithful / moral living as risky.
      5. So, one person will get it and one right next to them will be clueless or in denial
      6. One will step up with courage, and one will miss the chance

3. As we live our lives of faith in real time, we have the opportunity to be encouraged by those who came before us, and to support those who are traveling alongside us
  - a. Being a follower of Jesus, a believer in God, that's not something you can just simple put in your calendar for one hour on Sunday, any more than you could add on your calendar times to be honest, or nice, or to love your spouse and kids
  - b. Living a life of faith in real time is the steady (maybe mostly boring) stuff which doesn't make it to Facebook or Instagram (or to your weekly call to mom, or your best friend)
  - c. But a life of faith in real time is what Jesus is calling us, not just in the times of turning points or crisis
  - d. There's a story about a air force pilot in training
    - i. Her commanding officer was hard on her as she trained
    - ii. He said to her: I want you so well trained that in an emergency you will fall back on your training, rather than hope you can "rise to the occasion"
    - iii. It's not that he didn't trust she would be a great pilot, but training is there so that things become second nature, muscle memory.
  - e. Jesus is talking about being ready for when things happen. It's about muscle memory, or perhaps heart memory?
    - i. A life of faith lived in real time is practice and muscle memory.
    - ii. Consider turning points in your life, decision points which demanded your action,
      1. whether to protect your loved ones,
      2. whether to stand up for what's right,
      3. whether to resist temptation,
      4. whether to help someone stay on the right path,
      5. whether to instill the right lesson,
      6. whether to do the right thing when no one was watching, or when everyone was watching.
  - f. The cloud of witnesses Hebrews talks about is encouragement, not to shame us into action, but to support us in the courageous path we need to take.
    - i. If there is a cloud of witnesses is above us, then there is a crowd of witnesses is around us.
    - ii. We get to encourage each other in the midst of living this life of faith.
  - g. And to be clear: the cloud of witnesses, they were not perfect.
    - i. They were faithful. Their faith ebbed and flowed, but they trusted God as best they could and the Spirit worked in them .
    - ii. Some of those listed had mixed resumes.
    - iii. But the point is that they ran their race to the best of their ability with God's help

- iv. Ours is the chance right now to run this race, together, as a group, not to “win” it but to run with integrity, with compassion.
  - v. To live a life of faith in real time, not to make the headlines or gain a Nobel prize, but to be the most human, the most real, the most faithful we can be.
4. Practice compassion, love and justice daily, so that it becomes muscle memory. Live a life of faith in real time, so when the turning point arrives, your actions will naturally be what God is calling you to be and do.

#### Reflection questions

1. Think about a person in your life who was an example of faithfulness, of a life well lived. Consider what lessons they taught you which you took to heart.
2. Hebrews 11:29–12:2 speaks about the “great cloud of witnesses.” How does it help you knowing the stories of faith of people in the Bible?
3. How can you be part of the “great cloud of witnesses” before you die, so that your actions can be of encouragement for others in their faith journey?

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-20-3/commentary-on-hebrews-1129-122-6>

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/first-sunday-of-advent/commentary-on-matthew-2436-44-5>