

Pentecost 21—B (supplemental)  
2 Kings 5:14-27  
The Good Life

“I do have a family, so it’s going to be a little harder this year. But I’m going to push through it.” What do you think the context of that statement is? It’s a quote by Josh Smith, a forward for the Los Angeles Clippers, commenting on only making \$6.9 million this season after making over \$10 million each of the last 8 seasons! We look at that kind of greed and say: “How could you say that?”

If you happen to be shopping for a new car, you may be interested in the most expensive car in the world. It’s a car made in Sweden called the Koenigsegg CCXR Trevita, a car that is literally coated in diamonds, has a 1000 horsepower V-8 dual supercharged engine—and it costs \$4.8 million. I would assume, and I would hope, that if I stood up here this morning and said that I needed that car to go out there and make calls on people to share the gospel of Jesus Christ—and that I felt all of you should provide that car for me—you would at the very least say, “Pastor Engel, we’ve got to tell you something. That is not going to happen.”

The reason I mention this is because some of you may remember the story from this past spring where a well-known mega church preacher from Atlanta, Georgia named Creflo Dollar didn’t ask for a \$4.8 million car, but he did ask 200,000 of his listeners to give \$300 each so he could purchase a \$65 million jet airplane, primarily because his present jet was getting old, and he needed something safer and more reliable as he proclaimed the gospel around the world. He thought it was appropriate to get something like that for his work in the church of God.

Greed is something we all have to watch out for, and this morning we are going to meet Elisha’s servant named Gehazi. It was a day he would never forget. Because it was a day that changed everything. It was the day that he learned what “the good life” is all about. He was what we would perhaps call an assistant. Now, while you can do OK as an assistant, there usually is not a lot of money in it. And that was the problem. One thing Gehazi knew was that to have the “good life,” you got to have money.

And Gehazi knew a little bit about the “good life.” He’d seen it up close. See, his boss was a famous prophet, named Elisha. And sometimes Elisha would get invited to speak to the king. It would be like if Pastor Sternberg or I were invited to the White House. You go to some high rolling White House function with all those high rolling people and all of the sudden “the good life” gets a whole new level of definition, doesn’t it? Well, Gehazi got to see “the good life” at the king’s place, up close and personal (2 Kings 8). Little old Gehazi from some little old town in Israel, probably no bigger than Goodhue or Hay Creek. And here he was, standing in the king’s palace. Seeing “the good life” up close. And he liked it. Who wouldn’t? But it took money. That was the problem. Same problem you and I have, isn’t it? Money: specifically, not enough of it. Even our church suffers from that problem from time to time.

You should know that Gehazi had no problem with hard work (1 Kings 4), just like you, I trust. But even with his hard work, there just wasn’t enough money for “the good life.”

Then something happened. A high-powered successful unbeliever named Naaman from another country, a pagan country, came to Elisha to be miraculously cured of his leprosy. In an instance he contracted the horrible disease, which would eventually eat away at his skin and take away his life. But a little slave girl who had been captured in the land of Israel and was a servant for Naaman’s wife told Naaman to go see the prophet in Israel, the prophet Elisha. And so he did. God then told Elisha to tell Naaman to wash himself seven times in the little Jordan River,

and that in so doing he would be healed of his leprosy. And so he did. And exactly what the Lord said would happen did happen. Elisha was just the human instrument. He had no reason to want to get something for it. The Lord God, who has all, had given all to help a man from a foreign nation who had nowhere else to turn. He was cured—not only of his leprosy, but also of his unbelief. Not only was his body saved from ravages of disease. His soul was saved from the ravages of hell. He was brought to faith in the true God.

Naaman had brought along a whole lot of cash and prizes to pay for this cure—really good stuff. The kind you would find, say, in a king’s palace, and Gehazi noticed. But Elisha refused payment for his services. Now, sometimes Elisha did accept donations from people (2 Kings 4), and that was OK. God wanted his prophet to be able to eat and keep a roof of his head, too. So he did accept donations sometimes. But not this time because he didn’t want this brand new believer named Naaman to get the wrong idea. Elisha didn’t want this new believer in the Lord to get the wrong impression that God’s blessings had to be purchased or to give any impression on his part that he was just some miracle worker out to make money. See, back then some religious leaders used religion as a way to get people’s money—can you imagine that? Use religion as a way to get people’s money?! Well, Elisha wanted to make crystal clear that that’s not how it is with the religion of the true God who can save not just bodies but also souls. So he said: *“As surely as the LORD lives, in whose presence I stand, I will not take anything”* (16).

Gehazi, I suspect, was thinking that his ship had come in. But now Elisha was sending it away. There went Naaman...and the money. Walking away. Just because this prophet was too, what, ignorant? Too not-living-in-the-real-world? To see what was right in front of his face. But clergy can be like that, can’t they?

But Gehazi was not. He knew that it took money to live. And it took a lot of money to live “the good life.” So, without Elisha seeing, he ran after Naaman to get him some of that honey pot. Now, Gehazi is not a mean guy. He doesn’t want to make his boss, Elisha, look bad, so he tells a little lie: *“Look, just now two young men from the hill county of Ephraim, from the sons of the prophets, have come to me. Please give them a talent of silver and two sets of clothing”* (22). See, it’s not for Elisha, it’s for some poor, young pastors, who maybe have poor, young children at home.

He asked for a talent of silver (75 pounds of silver; it is difficult to say exactly what that would mean in today’s dollars; but no matter whose estimates you use, a talent of silver was like winning the lottery for working man like Gehazi) and 2 sets of clothing (because if you are going to live the “good life”, you want to look the part, too). But Naaman, whose heart was so full of gratitude, gave him TWO talents of silver. TWO TALENTS OF SILVER—Gehazi was set! Maybe set for life! Good bye being an assistant, hello lounging on the beach at some exotic five star hotel.

And then something happens that he doesn’t count on. He gets busted. By God. Through the prophet Elisha. *“Didn’t my heart go along when the man got down from his chariot to meet you? Is this the time to take silver, or to accept clothes”* (26)? There were times to accept gifts, but this was not one of those times. And the assistant, Gehazi, had no right to contradict his boss’ decision.

And then God does Gehazi a great, great favor. If Gehazi is in heaven, you can be sure that the first thing he did was to thank God over and over and over for what God did next. What God does next is to give him Naaman’s leprosy. *“Na’aman’s leprosy will cling to you and to your descendants forever.’ Then Gehazi went out from his presence, leprous like snow”* (27). I

guess he got to keep the money. But he would never be able to enjoy it. Lepers could never go into a store; they had to stay away from everybody else, as the disease slowly destroyed their body.

Gehazi defined “the good life” in terms of having money, and the kinds of things money can buy—financial security, early retirement, really good food, travel, experiences, nice clothes, and a great house. And because of that, his soul was rotting away. And hell was salivating.

This leprosy was a gift. It was meant as a gift from God to Gehazi. To gave Gehazi a chance to reconsider what “the good life” really is. And repent.

And how about you? How do you define “the good life?” Like Gehazi did? Have you absorbed our culture’s sinful view of what “the good life” is? Then, like Gehazi, you are thinking that you’re biggest problem is that you don’t have enough money. But be warned—your definition of “the good life” is rotting your soul. And hell is salivating.

But maybe our Lord will take pity on you and give you a gift, a gift like leprosy, or bad knees, or trouble with your children, or a job layoff, or this sermon.

How can you tell if greed is creeping up in your heart? Let’s take a look at this list:

- 1) Do I view my money and possessions as mine or God’s?
- 2) Am I more concerned about making money than I am about my eternal destiny?
- 3) What is the source of my security: money or God?
- 4) How much do I mourn the loss of money and things?
- 5) Do I cling to my things or am I generous and ready to share?
- 6) Do I compromise godly character or priorities in the pursuit of making money?
- 7) Am I prone to get-rich-quick schemes?

So what can we do about this? Here are a few helpful hints:

1. Thankfulness
2. Generosity
3. Prioritize eternal things
4. Trust God’s promises to you

Jesus defined the “good life” this way: *“I have come that they might have life and have it to the full.”* (John 10:10) But the funny thing about the “good life” according to Jesus is that it doesn’t seem like a good life at all, does it? The “good life” means going to church every Sunday? Having daily devotions and applying what you learn to your life? Daily going through that emotional roller coaster of regretting your sins, repenting of them, and feeling great relief that those sins were washed away at your baptism, and then struggling to do better next time? Does that really seem like where the “good life” is to be found? Well, yes. Or do we think Jesus was lying to us?

But if Jesus did *“come that they might have life and have it to the full,”* then our biggest problem is NOT that we don’t have enough money. Our biggest problem is that we don’t trust his teachings deeply enough. Because you can be sure of this—the more deeply you trust each of his teachings, the more deeply you will be able to say: “Ah, I have the good life,” even when there is more month than money. For Jesus said: *“I have come that they might have life, and have it to the full.”*

This is why our Lord calls on us to make his Word and worship the top priority of our life. He teaches us to daily repent of our sin and remember our baptism, the day he washed away that sin. He taught us to pray regularly: “Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by thy name,

thy kingdom come.” Thy kingdom come: “Dear Father, rule more and more like a king in the kingdom of my heart by your Word and Sacraments.” For it is only by our Father sending his Spirit through the Word/Sacraments that we can believe the teachings of our Savior more and more deeply. After all, the Holy Spirit is the “Lord and giver of life.”

And then the money that we also need to have “the good life” (because you do need money, is that not true) will also be given. For he said: “*Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness* (found in his W/S) *and all these other things* (like money) *will be given you as well.*” (Matthew 6:33) Enough so that you can sit back with a beverage and say: “Ah, God has been good to me.” Maybe not because you have so much on the outside, but because you have so much of the Holy Spirit’s work on the inside, his work of faith, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:23). For the “good life” does not come from outside things into us, but rather from our inside things changing how we view outside things.

And one day, when you die, instead of hell opening its salivating maw and devouring you, instead you will be welcomed into heaven, by the One who died and rose again to earn it for you.

You and I have all. We know Jesus Christ as our Savior Lord. We also have opportunity after opportunity to worship him and to serve him and to pray to him and to let others know about him. So we, who have gotten all, give our all—all our heart and soul and mind to carry on the mission God has given his people. In this lesson from God’s Word, Gehazi ran after something that made it look like God’s gifts or God’s love were something to be profited from in a greedy way. What we pray we will always do is run after those things in a way that shows that we know that God’s gifts and God’s love and God’s forgiveness and God’s blessings are totally free, even though they have been purchased by God himself at the highest cost imaginable—far greater than a multi-million dollar car, far greater than a many-multi-million dollar jet airplane.

The One who came “*so that we might have life, and have it to the full.*” Now and forever. Amen.