# Congregational-Presbyterian Church

**“Living Well – Dying Well”**

**1 Samuel 31:1-6**

**July 11, 2021**

How well do you know your movies? Let me share with you a dialogue from a movie and see if you can figure out what movie it is. In the movie, a small-time boxer who also works as a collector for a loan shark is mocked by his trainer who consistently calls him a bum. Finally, the boxer has it out with his trainer “For six years you’ve been training me, and for six years you’ve been sticking it to me, and I want to know how come?” “You don’t want to know,” replies his trainer. “I want to know how come,” the boxer insists. “You want to know?” “I want to know.” “Okay, I’m going to tell you. You had the talent to become a good fighter, but instead of that, you became a leg breaker for some cheap, second-rate loan shark.” “It’s a living,” says the boxer. “It’s a waste of life,” the trainer replies. Do you know the movie? It’s *Rocky,* and Mickey, the trainer, is observing that Rocky, the boxer, is wasting his life.

There are many of us who at some point have wondered whether we are wasting our life. We have the sense that our lives are supposed to count for something. How, then, do we live our lives well, so that indeed they do count for something, and how will we die well, assured that we haven’t wasted the life we’ve been given?

This summer we have been following the lives of David and his nemesis king Saul through the book of First Samuel. Saul began his life well. He was anointed king of Israel and given the chance to lead his nation. He began well, but he didn’t live his life well, and he didn’t die well. I invite you to turn with me to 1 Samuel 31:1-6

Now the Philistines attacked Israel, and the men of Israel fled before them. Many were slaughtered on the slopes of Mount Gilboa. The Philistines closed in on Saul and his sons, and they killed three of his sons—Jonathan, Abinadab, and Malkishua. The fighting grew very fierce around Saul, and the Philistine archers caught up with him and wounded him severely. Saul groaned to his armor bearer, “Take your sword and kill me before these pagan Philistines come to run me through and taunt and torture me.” But his armor bearer was afraid and would not do it. So Saul took his own sword and fell on it. When his armor bearer realized that Saul was dead, he fell on his own sword and died beside the king. So Saul, his three sons, his armor bearer, and his troops all died together that same day.

The writer of First Samuel has been tracking two lives, Saul and David, moving back and forth between the two. He wants us to see two different lives with two different hearts – one drifting further and further into disobedience, and the other drawing closer and closer to God in obedience. One is after his own heart; the other is after God’s own heart. And this morning we have learned the conclusion of the life without God – a tragic end to a poorly lived life. We read Saul’s epitaph in 1 Chronicles 10:13-14, “Saul died because he was unfaithful to the Lord. He failed to obey the Lord’s command, and he even consulted a medium instead of asking the Lord for guidance.”

The reason Saul’s has been a poor life with a poor end is not that God has not been good to Saul, or that God has not shown him favor. God chose him to be king. God created him tall and handsome, and he was an impressive young man when he became king. God gave Saul his Holy Spirit, and it was by that Spirit that Saul prophesied and won battles early in his reign. But, then Saul began to take his own path rather than God’s. He began to take matters into his own hands instead of waiting for God’s guidance. He began to reject the Word of God.

Now, it was not the case that Saul was disobedient and David always obedient. They were both imperfect in many ways. But David was willing to admit his wrongs and return to God, humbling himself and seeking God’s will. Could Saul have been a David? Yes! If he had wanted to. Saul was free to choose how to live his life, but he was not free to choose the consequences of that choice. And neither are we.

So, what should we do to ensure that we live our lives well? Let me suggest two words to guide us, both beginning with the letter “o.” First, open yourself to God. Come clean before him with your flaws, your brokenness, and your fears. David, in contrast to Saul, opened himself to God. He invited God into his messy life, and God guided him to live it well. “Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life” (Psalm 139:23-24). Start your day with that prayer, aware of your shortcomings and desiring God to forgive them and to somehow use them for good, and you will be on your way to living well.

Open yourself to God, flaws, brokenness, fears, and all. Then what? Offer yourself to God. He has already accepted you and will use you for his perfect purposes. God made Saul a king, and Saul decided that he knew best how to be king. God made David a king, and David was certain that God knew best how he was to be king. God knows best how you and I can live our lives well. Having begun your day being open with God about who you are, prayerfully offer yourself to God and ask him to use you for his glory. When we offer him ourselves, willing to go where he leads, to do what he asks, to live as he directs, then we no longer need to worry whether we are wasting our lives. You see, it’s not our problem anymore. It’s now up to God to guide us and to show us how to live our lives well. And, having lived our lives well in the Lord, we will also die well in the Lord, and those wonderful words will be said of us, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”