

Rev. Janet R. Doyle  
Elmer Presbyterian Church  
19th Sunday after Pentecost  
Sunday, October 19, 2025  
Scripture: Philippians 1:12-30  
Sermon: Living For Christ

When you hear certain people's names you associate them with something. When you hear Arnold Palmer you think of golf. Frank Sinatra, you may think of the song "New York, New York." Alexander Graham Bell- the telephone, Bill Gates-Microsoft, Lucille Ball- Comedy and "I love Lucy" show.

What do people associate your name with?

Thor Kappfjell, was a parachutist who gained international fame with his daredevil leaps from some of the world's tallest buildings and he was known as the Human Fly. The Norwegian-born Kappfjell launched himself from 200 buildings, mountains and towers including the Eiffel Tower, the Empire State Building and the World Trade Center in March of 1999. In July of 1999 the 32 year old daredevil lost his life in Norway jumping off of a Mountain in the fog with a parachute but lost his bearings and crashed into the side of the mountain.

Thor Kappfjell wanted to be known for his daredevil jumps. He wanted to be known to take on a challenge no one else wanted to do. He wanted to defy death and be known as the "Human Fly."

For him to live meant to jump off the highest building, mountains, and towers and live to tell about it. There was always another challenge to conquer.

There was a young climber who died recently, Balin Miller, a 23-year-old American alpinist who fell to his death while climbing El Capitan in Yosemite National Park on October 1, 2025. Miller was attempting to solo climb the "Sea of Dreams" route when he likely fell while repelling and gathering gear, according to his brother. His death was witnessed by others and may have been captured on a livestream.

Balin Miller wanted to be known for his climbing skills on the most challenging of mountains.

What do you want to be known for? What do you want to live for?

The section of scripture that we're going to be going through is Philippians 1: 12-30. And this section of scripture is a picture of Paul's life and how he boldly lived for Christ. From the minute that God radically redirected his life when he was on the road to Damascus, from being in jail, and through the highs and lows of his life, Paul did not stop boldly living for God. Remember that when he is writing this letter he is under Roman arrest. He sends a letter of encouragement to the Church of Philippi to encourage them, to fill them with joy in their walk of boldly living for Christ.

Philippians 1:20 says "For I fully expect and hope that I will never be ashamed, but that I will continue to be bold for Christ, as I have been in the past."

Paul's life was exactly this. He lived boldly for Christ, unashamed of who God was, unashamed of what the gospel was, any room, any area, any season of life that he was in, he was bold because of what Christ had done inside of him and he was willing to die for Christ.

Earlier in his life, Paul writes this in Romans 1:16. *"For I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes..."*

That's what Paul lived for. To experience the joy of boldly living for Christ. What does it look like in your life to boldly live for Christ?

Philippians 1:21 says, *"To live is Christ, and to die is gain."*

During this time period that Paul was in Rome Nero was the emperor. Paul would have to stand before Nero and give his defense for why he came under charges. Tacitus was a historian in first century Rome. He says this about Nero, the guy the Apostle Paul would be facing:

*"Besides being put to death, the Christians were made to serve as objects of amusement. They were clothed in the hides of beasts and torn to death by dogs. Others were crucified. Others were set on fire to serve to illuminate the night when daylight failed. Nero had thrown open his grounds for the display and was putting on a show and a circus where he mingled with the people in the dress of a charioteer and drove about in his*

*chariot. All this gave rise to a feeling of pity, for it was felt that they—the Christians—were being destroyed not for the public good but to gratify the cruelty of an individual."*

This is what's going on in Rome when Paul wrote, "To live is Christ, and to die is gain." There is an emperor who is torturing Christians to satisfy his own wicked desires. This is the guy that Paul is going up against.

Every religion has to answer two questions: What is life? and, What is death? Religions answer those two questions very differently. Buddhism says, "To live is to achieve good Karma, and to die is to hope for a better reincarnation." Islam teaches, "To live is to obey Allah, and if your good deeds outweigh your bad deeds, death is to achieve a personal paradise." Silicon Valley answers that question this way: "To live is self, and to die is loss." That's what the average person in Silicon Valley believes. Life is all about the self. And to die is to lose everything. That's very different from what the Apostle Paul says.

To many in this world Jesus is merely added to our lives. We stay at the center of the universe, and we ask Jesus to orbit around us. We say, "I like Jesus; he's great. I want some Jesus, I want some Christianity, I want some church. But I'm going to stay at the center of my life. Jesus, you orbit around me. I'll see you every time you come around."

That's not what Jesus wants from us though. Jesus comes into our life, and He tells us to die to ourselves. He becomes the new center of our lives. The issue of the whole Bible and the issue of our whole life is idolatry. Idolatry is putting anything other than God at the center of your life, at the center of your solar system.

It is said, "An idol is anything that gets more glory, more weight, more importance in our eyes than God does." What was the first commandment God gave to his people? "You shall have no other gods before me." If you break the first commandment, you break all the other commandments. The first commandment is to not have anything other than God at the center of your life. Humans were made to worship. The issue isn't if we're going to worship; it's what we're going to worship, who we're going to worship. Everyone in Silicon Valley worships. But what do we worship, who do we worship as a god? All sin comes from valuing something more than God, placing something other than God at the center of our lives.

How you define life will set the tone for how you think about death. If life is all about comfort, you're not going to like death because death isn't comfortable. If life is all about control, you're not going to like death because you don't know when it's going to strike.

But Paul says this: "Death is gain." Things get better. You get more of what you want. I invest in things I like because I want to get a good return. In verse 23 Paul says, "I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far." So if you define life through Christ, then death is gain. When you die you get more of Christ.

That's why a Christian is invincible. Even if you kill us, we are not defeated. We get to be with Jesus. Our death isn't the last you're going to see of us, because we are going to live forever in the presence of Jesus, worshipping him. That's freedom. Paul truly believed this. No matter what happened to Paul, he experienced more freedom.

Do you want to throw me in prison? Do you want to beat me? Do you want to take away my money? Do you want to take my life? I don't care. I'm free because to live is Christ. My life isn't based upon money, or fame, it's not based upon freedom to do whatever I want. It's based on Jesus Christ, and he's never going to fail me. I'm always with him.

Paul makes it clear in the rest of this passage that we have a battle to fight. He has told us what life is about, he has told us what death is about, and he tells us there is a battle that we have to fight when we live here on earth.

In verse 27 he says, "Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ so that whether I come and see you or I am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit with one mind, striving side by side for the faith of the gospel." The word for "striving" is an army word. It comes from the Roman military. Roman soldiers fought side by side. They didn't fight independently. They band together, they put their shields together, and they fight as this unit, as a group. That's how the Romans fought. It made them a successful army, because they knew how to fight together, united. They based their battle tactics on that. Paul says to these believers in Philippi that Christians are called to fight, to strive together. Christianity is a team sport, and it calls for a fight.

What Paul says in verse 27 is striking. He says, "To live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel, you have to fight. You're going to strive side

by side together in this fight." Why? Because we're called to live for Christ in a place that's hostile to him. The city of Philippi was not an easy place to be a believer. Neither is our world today. We're called to live for Christ in an environment, in a city, in a culture that's hostile to Jesus Christ—not in the same way as Philippi or Rome 2,000 years ago. No one is threatening our execution in our country, though our brothers and sisters in other parts of the world are facing that. But it's still a challenge everyday to live for Christ.

The goal of Paul's life is attained when Christ is magnified in his body, whether by life or by death. The key to magnifying Christ in life and in death is to find him more precious, more valuable, more satisfying, more joyful, more worthy than everything we lose in death — "to die is gain" — and everything we have in life — "to live is Christ."

There is a new movie out in the theater called "Soul On Fire". It is a true story about John O'Leary. His story is one of remarkable recovery after a childhood accident resulted in him being burned on 100% of his body as a nine-year-old. He is now an inspirational speaker and author who shares his experiences of survival, resilience, and living with purpose. The accident, caused by a gasoline and match experiment, left him with less than a 1% chance of survival, but he endured a long and difficult recovery to eventually thrive.

The accident was in 1987, John was playing with matches and gasoline in his garage, imitating older neighborhood kids. The resulting explosion engulfed him in flames, leading to severe, third-degree burns across 100% of his body.

John miraculously pulled through. His recovery was long and arduous, involving months in the hospital, numerous surgeries, and years of rehabilitation where he had to relearn basic life skills like walking, writing, and feeding himself.

But his life became an inspiration for others because John turned his tragedy into a message of hope and resilience. He is now an internationally renowned inspirational speaker, a husband, a father of four, and the author of several books, including "On Fire: 7 Choices to Ignite a Radically Inspired Life". John O'Leary's testimony emphasizes how, even in the face of overwhelming odds, one can choose to live a radically inspired life. John has faith in his Savior and contributes his survival to prayer, community

support and the power of choosing a positive mindset even in the face of death.

An unbelievers' mindset is a pursuit of one's own joy and happiness through selfish means that does not satisfy the soul. Living for Christ's glory, however, is the deepest and most fulfilling of all pursuits.

To Paul, living meant Christ and dying meant being with Christ. Either way, Christ was central. We must ask ourselves what life means to us and what keeps us going. For Paul, life was Christ.

When Paul says "to me to live is Christ," he means Christ is everything to him. Christ is all in all.

We must examine if Christ dominates our lives like He did Paul's. This is the difference between true faith and empty religion.

If Christ is our life, self is no longer our life. We no longer live for ourselves or the world.

May our lives not be centered on our own desires but on Christ.

To Paul, life with Christ meant thinking, feeling, desiring, and acting centered on Christ.

We are citizens of the Kingdom-may we live saying "for me to live is Christ and to die is gain."