

YOLO. Chances are good that if you know anyone under the age of 30 then you've heard them say this. If you're a regular on Twitter, you've seen YOLO -- guaranteed. If you do Facebook, you've seen it in hashtag form describing all kinds of craziness. YOLO is an acronym for "You only live once." Think of it as "carpe diem" for the digital age, and, over the years, it's arguably become the motto for many, if not most, of the millennial generation.

With eyes and ears now poised to spot it, don't be surprised when you see YOLO attached to all kinds of less-than-noble aims and activities. For many, the phrase "You only live once" is less of a motivation for meaningful living and more of a convenient, sometimes tongue-in-cheek, justification for fun, if not reckless, living.

You're most likely to see YOLO tagged onto a 140-character description of someone's antics while on spring break in South Beach, Miami, then on how hard they'd been studying for the SATs. It's emblazoned on the T-shirts of frat boys setting up a keg stand, and it has no doubt been written in washable marker on the hands of teenage girls, stuck in study hall, reflecting on the foolishness of last Friday night.

We can think of YOLO as yet another harmless, but annoying, acronym that's easy to hate. Soon it will be right up there with TGIF, LOL and OMG. Or, we can play dime-store psychologist and choose to see something deeper going on. What if YOLO is the cry of a generation that longs for significance but, turned around in a culture of instant gratification and self-absorption, has no idea how to find it except to justify their short-sighted behavior with a catchphrase meant to convince themselves that they're really just wringing the most out of life. What if?

Before we judge an entire generation too harshly, we must first turn the mirror onto everyone else. We must realize that the rest of us have creative ways of justifying our behavior as we search for deeper meaning, too. Ok, so we may not

be walking around in a YOLO T-shirt. Instead, the Boomer Generation prefers things like a "bucket list" -- a string of activities you'd like to do before you die that you probably don't have the time, the money, or the health to do. Those of us who are Gen-Xers tend to have an obsession with self-help, be it in the form of bestselling books, motivational speakers, or episodes of *Dr. Oz*?

Are these not ways of adding meaning to, and/or wringing the most out of everyday life? The only difference is that when you're young it's pub-crawls, taking selfies, posting everything on social media sites, and accepting and participating in dumb online challenges like the cold water, the cinnamon, or the gallon of milk challenge. When you're older it's skydiving in Hawaii, writing a book, and finding ways to incorporate more fiber into your diet. "YOLO, baby!"

**A fun life, or a full life?** Into our world of annoying acronyms and indulgent lists comes Jesus who, in today's text, takes on our search for significance. "The thief comes only to steal and destroy," he says. "I have come so that [my people] may have life and have it abundantly."

With these words, two profound things are made clear to us. First, Jesus affirms our desire for a well-lived life. One of the goals of his ministry was to make sure that we experience a full life as God intended it. This is good news. Second, he tells us that, although others will come making similar claims, only he - Jesus -- can truly deliver.

Whether you're of the YOLO generation, or part of the Bucket List Brigade, you'll swing and miss if Jesus isn't the Shepherd in your life. You can yell "YOLO!" while you bungee jump, "carpe diem" all day long, and record as many episodes of *Dr. Oz* as your DVR can handle and you'll have a *fun* life. But only Jesus gives the *full* life -- at least that's what he claims. Therefore, if you're serious about arriving at the end of your life spent, satisfied and fulfilled, then examining

what Jesus is able to bring to your existence, to make it abundant, is worth some serious effort.

Let's take just three common concerns -- three driving values -- that often sit at the center of our obsessive drive to make the most out of our time on this earth, out of our "one life." The first is a concern for significance. Most every human being, but in particular the current population of young adults, is inspired by the idea of giving their lives to a cause that's bigger and more noble than themselves. For example, a survey of more than 6,500 millennials (ages 20-35) found that more than 75 percent had given money to a non-profit, and that more than 70 percent had actively encouraged others to do the same. We want to give our lives to something of significance. If Christ is who he claims to be, then his agenda -- in which he has invited us to take part -- becomes the most significant, most noble and noteworthy cause the world has or will ever know.

What can be of greater importance than connecting those who are estranged from God with the grace, mercy and reconciliation of God? What is more significant than proclaiming the arrival of a new and desperately needed kingdom through word, sacrament, and acts of mercy and love? What possibly matters more than binding up the hurts of the broken and the hearts of the weary with tangible love and a message of peace from above? Nothing!!

The second value, or concern, that drives so many in life is excitement. Many are afraid that they'll lay their head down to sleep, they will pray for their souls to keep, but on their final night of existence, they will come to the realization that they never took a risk. We want to live having embraced adventure. No one says on his or her deathbed, "You know, I probably should have been more boring." And so, when we're young, we drive cross-country with a few buddies on a whim, and when we're older we dream about hiking the Appalachian Trail.

Following Jesus satisfies our sense of, and thirst for, adventure. We have the opportunity to listen for the call of God, and to lay it out there for his cause -- if we want to. God invites us to get up, gear up, and get out into the world to make a difference -- to make God's world known in this world. Notice that the Shepherd in our story calls his sheep by name, but instead of leading them in, he leads them out. When they are together, he goes ahead of them and they follow him because they know his voice.

The catch 22 of this phrase is that we need to be able to recognize the voice of the Shepherd. "If we can't distinguish between his voice, and that of a stranger, so that we can flee from those trying to rob us of our faith and or relationship with Christ, does this indicate that we don't know the Shepherd very well? I'm reminded of all of our dogs, cats, and animals at home that can recognize when we call their names, or of our children that are able to recognize a parent calling to them when they are outside playing with their friends!

If we want to be intentional about following him, if we want to live a meaningful life filled with purpose, if we want to find complete and utter satisfaction, then we need to be intentional about getting to know Jesus and his voice. We need to persistently spend time with our Lord and Shepherd in scripture, in prayer, in worship, and by getting to know who, or what, the thieves and bandits are in our lives that are trying to steal us away from him. We also need to be willing to follow Jesus out into the World for that is where he is calling us to go! As much as he is present here with us in this church, in this sanctuary this morning, his Spirit is also out there in our communities, neighborhoods, workplaces, in our bars, schools, rec centers, and, eating establishments, calling us to join him in sharing God's love with everyone.

This doesn't mean necessarily that we'll be asked to risk everything for the cause of Christ, or to do something earthshaking in our service to him. But it *does*

mean that we should live our lives ready for sacrifice, inconvenience, and commitment. No guts, no glory. God can and does ask for our all, for our best, for our 100 percent faithfulness. And when we give it to God, well, then things can get pretty interesting and exciting. Being a committed disciple of Jesus Christ is not for the faint of heart. What if every morning we woke up with an attitude that said, "Whatever Jesus asks of me today the answer is yes. YOLO." Do that and you'll never lack for excitement.

Last, and certainly not least, what drives so many of us is, as already stated, is a fear of being disappointed at the end. We get freaky that, in the end, we will have missed the point. So, we try to cram as much living into life as possible, not realizing that when we're about to check out, we're likely to realize that, although we were running, we were running in circles. Lots of movement, but with no momentum; lots of pursuit, but with no purpose.

Enter Jesus Christ who offers a YOLO culture the greatest comfort: an abundant life. The point and purpose of life is not found in any one task, but simply in knowing a Person. The greatest promise Christ offers is this: that if we've found him, if we've been forgiven and reconciled to God, then we have -- right now -- embraced the point of our personal existence.

Now, no matter what we do, or don't do in the days to come, when we stand face-to-face with God, we will hear the words, "I love you, and well done!" We were put here not to build up a resume of righteousness through Pinterest-worthy adventures and personal awesomeness, but to be blessed in the righteousness of Christ.

But here's the thing: *Knowing this*, we now have the freedom to risk greatly, give deeply, and to chase the things of God without fear of failure. Why? Because we've already succeeded! The one goal, of this one life, is fulfilled: we're connected to Christ! Now we can love deeply, give generously and go

adventurously -- not in order to hit the mark, but because we've already nailed it. Or rather, because Christ has.

YOLO. With eyes and ears now poised to spot it, don't be surprised when you see it attached to all kinds of less-than-noble aims and activities. The same is true for our "bucket lists." Yes, it's true: we only live once. So, let's wring the most out of this life. But let us do so, by remembering that there's only one who offers a significant life, an abundant life. And that person is Jesus Christ. Thanks be to God. Amen.