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Since before the birth of Christ, human beings have searched for magic, even if they didn't always call it by that name. Something that had the ability to give what so many people deeply long for: to never age, to never get sick or injured, to live forever. Historians have found evidence of this longing dating back to the 5th Century BCE, in ancient writings that detailed quests for something called the fountain of youth. A magical mysterious source of water able to alter a person's body so that it would never change, never grow old, and never die.

Throughout the centuries the fountain of youth has appeared off and on in stories, myths, and legends. Somewhere in all that history, the fountain of youth mythology got entangled with the legends of the Holy Grail, the cup Christ supposedly used at the Last Supper. This gave the grail the magic to heal any injury or illness and prevent death. Thus, the search for the magic water that could cheat death got mixed up with Jesus' promise of eternal life.

Centuries later, the fountain of youth still shows up in modern culture, especially in entertainment like movies. In the 1985 movie *Cocoon*, three residents of a nursing home snuck out to go swimming in a neighbor's pool whose magic waters, powered by alien technology, made their all their aches, pains, and forgetfulness of age disappear, and they vital once again. The Tuck family in the 1975 book and 2002 movie *Tuck Everlasting*, discovered a small spring at the root of a large oak tree that magically made them impervious to injury, disease, and death. Indiana Jones and his father undertook an adventurous quest to find the Holy Grail before the Third Reich to prevent the Nazis from obtaining the secret to living forever in the movie *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*. Likewise, the rogue pirate Captain Jack Sparrow in the movie *On Stranger Tides* from the *Pirates of the Caribbean* franchise followed a map to the fountain of youth Ponce de Leon supposedly found.

All these stories are entertaining and carry with them a warning that while being forever young sounds appealing, it comes at a terrible cost, one that does not give life, but limits it. In Indiana Jones, that limitation was a physical boundary; living forever was limited to a small area in a remote desert. Once you crossed the boundary, you were as mortal as everyone else. *On Stranger Tides* warns living forever will never have the satisfaction or fulfillment of living the life you enjoy. In *Cocoon's* sequel, the men who had left earth to live forever on another planet discover never dying is lonely. In *Tuck Everlasting*, a teenage girl who discovered the family who cannot die, observed they were so isolated from everyone else they didn't consider themselves human, and lived in a constant state of fear of being discovered. From them the girl learned not to fear dying or growing old, but instead the greatest tragedy is the un-lived life. That story is summed up in one lovely sentence that perhaps speaks to all fountain of youth myths: "You don't have to live forever. You just have to live."

This wisdom is what Jesus is referring to in today's Gospel when he talked about being the living bread that comes down from heaven and those who eat this bread will live forever. Other translations use the term eternal life to express the same thing. Despite how myths and legends have gotten tangled up in the Gospel of John's theology of the kind of life Jesus brings, Jesus was never talking about magic that would allow us to by-pass aging, illness, suffering, loss, or pain. Jesus himself did not get to skip this stuff. For example, Jesus felt the deep pain of grief when John the Baptist was executed. Perhaps an expression of this grief is when Jesus began to preach the same message as John the Baptist to repent, to change, and return to God. Jesus was not able to skip the cruel torture and suffering of his own death, revealing being incarnate, being Word Made Flesh, did not mean not living. It meant living life with all its joys, challenges, disappointments, injustices, pain, and letting God raise him from death, and into the new resurrection life that is for us all. Not as an escape from aging or death, but as a different kind of life, one not held captive to fear.

That kind of life is defined in the theological dictionary as “participating in God’s reign and in the benefits of salvation through faith in Jesus by work of the Holy Spirit right now in the present, and after death will be consummated by life in heaven in God’s presence.” That’s a churchy mouthful that is trying to articulate eternal life, or living forever as Jesus meant in today’s Gospel, and is what is touched on in the other readings for today: living fully into God’s dream for us right now. That means learning to listen to and discern and do God’s will for us personally, as a church, a community, and world.

It starts with doing our best to follow the promises we make in the baptismal covenant: to love God and each other by treating each other with respect and dignity, to participate as best we can in our community and parish, to pray, to study, to recognize and resist evil and when we have sinned or harmed someone to stop, change, ask forgiveness, and to give forgiveness. To love as God loves, to be generous with what we have and strive always for justice and peace for all people, not only ourselves. This isn’t just a lot of words we say whenever we baptize someone, it is a way of life, a practice, a discipline, and is what Jesus talks about in the Gospel. A life that strives to be in relationship with God through Jesus, a life that strives to reveal God’s love in what we do and say, how we spend our money, what we do with our time, how we support each other, how we help, and makes room for each other. A life that doesn’t try to deny realities like injustices, economic disparity, aging, or illness, and does not allow those things to dehumanize ourselves or each other. A life that values all people.

This kind of life takes courage, it requires being uncomfortable, and won’t let us skip the hard parts of life, the wrinkles, weight fluctuations, changes in appearance, pain, disease, or losses. Eternal life of Christ won’t let us skip changes, but it does offer us a chance to recognize God is with us through changes, even the painful ones, and any change can be a means for us to grow closer to God and each other.

We are reminded of this whenever we receive Holy Communion. Receiving the Body and Blood of Christ isn’t just a ritual intended to bring us comfort so we can go back out into the world and never give Jesus another thought; it is the deep reminder that we are what we eat, what we receive today and every day. The source of what sustains us is not what society thinks, how much money we have, our skills or talents, our appearance, or age, it is Jesus. That is why the author of John has Jesus describe himself as the living bread, the stuff of life eternal who gives himself to us so that we can live fully and deeply, giving ourselves to one another, and share God’s love even in changes.

While it might be an alluring fantasy to sip magic waters that will allow us to never have another doctor appointment, or surgery, and ultimately lets us cheat death, such magic will only create more longing and loneliness. The point and purpose of life is not to win, or never die, but to live, to live the life Jesus calls us to, one nourished, sustained, and renewed by God’s love which is our source of life, forever.