



5/03/2020

## “Having Abundant Life in Christ”

Scripture: Psalm 23; John 10:1-10; Acts 2:42-47

Fourth Sunday of Easter

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**Theme: When we listen to and follow Jesus, the Good Shepherd, we experience life to the full, in true abundance, and enter into salvation and eternal life through him.**

Listen to the words of Jesus from John 10:1-10 (NRSV):

Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.

Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. So again Jesus said to them, *“Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. **I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.**”*

Here, my friends, is another one of those scripture passages, perhaps my favorite of all, that speaks to us in every age and circumstance. It speaks to us of the abundant life that Jesus came to give all those who would hear and listen to his voice and follow him.

When you think of life, what comes to mind? And when you think of abundance of life, what images does that stir?

Let me ask another question this morning: Is there something you wish you had more of right now?

I am sure if I were to ask those questions a few months ago, then one month ago, and even today, the answers would be different for many of us. Yet, even now, as many face insecurity and uncertainty of health, relationships, school, finances, and others, we all have certain basic needs. And we all have other needs and desires of heart, mind and soul that define for us what a life of abundance looks like.

**First, there are physical and emotional needs.** They include . . .

Physiological things like food, water, and sleep. Although the current food supply has not been as affected for most of us by the pandemic, perhaps we will see more of a concern as processing plants are closed for a time. We can certainly be thankful for all that we do have. And although most of us are not on the road as much, are you getting the rest and sleep you need, or are you spending much more time thinking, even worrying, about making due and what’s next?



Safety needs like physical health and well-being, personal and financial security. For many of you watching, these may be important concerns which you face, especially when it comes to the COVID-19 pandemic. I don't think I have to remind you of all the concern and news around these factors every day.

Emotional and Social needs for love and belonging, such as friendship, family, and intimacy. Some of you are realizing the blessing of having those needs met, while others may be looking and longing for them to be filled in your life right now; especially as social distancing or being apart from loved ones continues. Some are enjoying spending more time with their pets, while others may be missing them as well.

Perhaps you can see how all of these needs are mentioned or suggested by the words Jesus uses to describe his relationship with his "sheep" or followers.

Further, we all need a sense of self-worth, or self-esteem. But lest that self-esteem becomes conceit and self-centeredness, Jesus teaches us that we should also have humility, and show caring and kindness to others as well. As he emphasized as one of the greatest commandments summing up the Law from God, "*Do to others as you would have them do to you.*" (Matthew 7:12)

When we think of a life of abundance, we might usually think of the rich and famous. But in times like these, we more often take note of how such persons, as well as the poor, are usually being recognized for the generosity, selfless care and kindness they demonstrate.

You may have an activity or activities that give you a sense of contribution, of feeling accepted and self-valued, be it in an occupation, a profession, a hobby or through volunteer service. I hope that many of us gain a sense of satisfaction not only from the financial compensation or pay we receive, but from the work that we do, or the volunteer service we provide. All these too have been evidenced in many wonderful ways through these challenging times.

One nice thing that came to mind was the flyover this past week by the Blue Angels and Thunderbirds to pay tribute to first responders and medical personnel. I also saw a Facebook post this week with a drive by procession acknowledging one of our congregation's teachers. And there are numerous persons who are acknowledging, encouraging, and protecting others in creative as well as more "ordinary" ways.

**For us to be fully human, and I would add as God intends us to be, we have even higher needs to fulfill.**

There are cognitive or mental needs, the expression of the natural human need to learn, explore, discover, and create to get a better understanding of the world around us. As difficult as this time we are presently in really is, consider how many are working together around the world to find a cure for this virus. And think of the young people who may enter fields of science, technology, and medicine because of it.

We might even consider a need for beauty, beautiful imagery or something new and aesthetically pleasing. The Psalms are a rich witness to the inspiration our ancestors in faith drew from



observing God's wonderful creation. We too can be refreshed in the presence and beauty of nature; carefully absorbing and observing our surroundings to extract the beauty that the world has to offer.

Just looking at the beautiful flowers, shrubs and trees, or sitting while watching and listening to the birds, squirrels, and other animals brings a sense of closeness to the source of all life, and a reminder of the simpler necessities and joys of life.

Then there are Spiritual needs – the realization of our relationship with God. This comes from the Holy Spirit. I believe we all need to know that we are beloved children of God; created in the image of God. A truly abundant life, that overflows with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, comes from our relationship with the living God of all.

The point I want to make of all this is that we all have needs: emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual. These needs go far beyond merely wanting more things. Now, more than ever, we realize just how significant that true and abundant life offered by Jesus Christ can be.

Here's a great witness shared by Darlene Forgues of Alberta, Canada, from *The Upper Room* for May 1. She writes ...

“Prostate cancer had metastasized to the bones throughout my husband's body. The next morning, my first thought was, Earle (her husband) is dying, and nothing is ever going to be all right again. Decades of dealing with my own diagnosis of bipolar disorder had left me helpless in the world of computers, banking, investments, home and car maintenance, and lawn care. Earle had dealt with all of these as well as doing most of the driving. Since I had concentrated all my efforts on fighting my way out of the pit of mental illness, I had no self-confidence. I fell to my knees and asked for the help that only God can give.

“God gave me strength as I started to learn all the responsibilities that I might soon have to deal with on my own — banking, making appointments, driving Earle and myself, downsizing as we moved into a smaller home. Then, after God was faithful in getting rid of my fears and giving me the ability to cope, Earle began to respond well to the cancer treatments. Though not in remission, Earle's cancer is controlled.

“Now able to do many things that had seemed beyond my capabilities before, I am sharing with Earle the abundant life Jesus promised to us if we would trust in him.

She prays: “Faithful God, we rejoice in your goodness. Thank you for physical healing and for the spiritual healing only you can provide. Amen.”

**So, remember, THE GOOD NEWS THE BIBLE TELLS US IS THAT BY GOD AND THROUGH JESUS OUR TRUE NEEDS CAN BE MET.**

**In fact, through Jesus, in Christ, we will have an abundance of all that we need!**

Using an image familiar to the people of his day, in our passage from John's gospel account, Jesus speaks of a flock of sheep. They, too, have needs for their well-being like food, water, safety, etc. But even more importantly, Jesus alludes to the spiritual life and well-being of his flock, those who listen to his voice and follow him.



I am sure some of you, as I, have experienced the abundant life Jesus has given.

And when I think of Jesus' words from this passage of John, I think of those of the **23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm**. They remind me of God's provision and care as the Great Shepherd of all God's people. Let me close with them, as you listen or read along from the NIV; or say them from your heart as you have learned them.

**The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.  
He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters,  
he restores my soul.  
He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.**

**Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil,  
for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.**

**You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.  
You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.**

**Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life,  
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.**

May all God's people say, Amen.