

Sermon For Sunday April 26 2026

Let's Not Be Sheepish About Abundance –John 10:1-10

I have a riddle for you from today's gospel (John 10:1-10). When is a sheepfold not a sheepfold, a gate not a gate, a thief and a bandit not a thief and a bandit, a shepherd not a shepherd, a sheep not a sheep, and a gatekeeper not a gatekeeper?

When they are a figure of speech. That's how Jesus is using them in today's gospel. And if we read today's gospel as if it means what it says we will be just like the Pharisees to whom Jesus is speaking. "They did not understand what he was saying to them."

Taken literally the text makes no sense. The rational, logical, intellectual mind cannot understand a figure of speech. A figure of speech asks us to think, see, and listen differently. It points and opens to something beyond itself.

What if the figure of speech Jesus uses is a window on our lives and an invitation to the abundant life? What is it showing us? offering us? asking of us?

Abundant Life

"I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly," Jesus says. What comes to mind when you hear that? What does abundance mean and look like for you? When I read the gospels it's pretty clear that abundance for Jesus is about a quality of life and not a quantity of stuff.

Nowhere in the gospel does Jesus help people win the lottery, get more stuff, or have more power and control. He does, however, command love, demonstrate compassion, care for the needs of others, offer mercy and forgiveness, heal lives, mend relationships, give peace, teach nonviolence, live with integrity and wholeheartedness.

Maybe abundance isn't something we acquire or possess. Maybe it's a way of living and being. It's not about a quantity but neither is about being in want. It's a fullness of life, like a cup running over. That running over isn't excess, it's abundance.

The abundant life compounds and enhances our lives and the lives of others. It refuses to add to the pain of the world. It is life running over to life, love running over to love, joy running over to joy, hope running over to hope, courage running over to courage, peace running over to peace, generosity running over to generosity, beauty running over to beauty, forgiveness running over to forgiveness, dignity running over to dignity, gratitude running over to gratitude. Isn't that what we see in the life of Jesus? And isn't that the life you want for others and yourself?

Where and in what ways is the running over life happening for you today? And if it's not, why isn't it? In what ways is your life abundant and where is it less than abundant? Please don't answer those questions as either an accomplishment or as a judgment. Let them be diagnostic, information about your life and what is and is not happening. Follow the questions and let them shepherd you to an abundant life of green pastures and still waters.

A Thief And A Bandit

When it comes to having life, and having it abundantly, the greatest threat are thieves and bandits. And we all have them. Jesus warns that they come "only to steal, kill, and destroy." They are predators of abundance. They don't steal our stuff. They take our life.

We've all had times when we felt impoverished and less than overflowing. Something was missing but it wasn't the kind of thing you could buy or acquire. We were feeling and living less than whole.

For me work, busyness, and exhaustion are often bandits in my life. Sometimes grief and sorrow have stolen my life. And then there's fear about the future and what will or will not happen; and the guilt, regrets, and disappointments of the past. Sometimes the question of whether I am enough is a thief that robs me of peace. The need to be productive and accomplished are repeat offenders in my life.

I've begun to see that when I keep score, measure outcomes, and quantify my life, my thieves and bandits have shown.

What about you? Who or what are the thieves and bandits in your life today? In what ways is your life being stolen? What have you lost? What are your thieves and bandits teaching and showing you about yourself?

The abundant life is a matter of the heart and the heart is the sheepfold of abundance. That means we must guard our heart against the thieves and bandits of an abundant life.

The Gate And The Gatekeeper

Jesus says that he is the gate. Gates open and close. Gates keep sheep in, and thieves and bandits out. Gates close to death and open to life. Jesus is the gate that encloses and protects what is of value. And he is the gate that opens to pastures of abundance, still waters of abundance, tables of abundance, cups of abundance.

What if Jesus is asking us to do the same? What would that look like in your life today?

We are the keeper and guardian of our heart, the sheepfold of abundance. Guarding our heart means staying awake, being watchful, and remaining diligent. Awareness of and reflection on what is happening within and outside us are the gatekeeper's key. Depending on who or what is at the gate we either open our heart or keep it closed. Sometimes we need to open the gate and sometimes we need to keep the gate of our life closed.

Who or what stands at your gates today? Who or what are the people, opportunities, possibilities, and choices that seek entry into your life? What thieves and bandits stand outside your gates? The gates in our life are threshold places, times of discernment, moments of transition, and decisions to be made.

What is nourishing and enlarging your life or the life of another? What is devouring and consuming your life? To whom or what do you need to open? And to whom or what do you need to close?

Don't Be Sheepish

"I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly," Jesus says. He does not, however, give specific answers or instructions about what that means. Instead he offers a figure of speech in which abundance is revealed, through which we see ourselves, and by which we take responsibility for our lives. Let's not be sheepish about living the abundant life. Amen.