

Resurrection Life: Jesus Gives Us Abundant Life
Psalm 23; John 10:1-10
A Sermon by Rev. Bob Kells

This morning we continue our sermon series called “Resurrection Life” with another lesson on one of the many ways the Resurrection of Jesus gives us new life. We have seen that with the Resurrection:

- Jesus gives us peace, the *shalom* of God, completeness, all we need, along with a purpose—to share the peace of God with others.
- And we’ve seen that Jesus gives us faith for the road, the kind of faith that sustains us and brings us joy through knowing the risen Christ.

Today brings us another promise of Jesus for his followers: “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.”

These are beautiful words. Abundant life. Not just life, just surviving or barely living, not eking out an existence, but life that is thriving, life that prospers, life that grows into something fruitful and wonderful.

But what is abundant life? What does it look like? Some people will hear this promise and think, “Oh good! Jesus is going to give me everything I want.” They’ll hear that promise of abundant life and in their consumer-oriented mindset go right to images of material goods, winning the lottery, buying whatever you like, accumulating piles and piles of stuff; so many goods that we can’t even fit it all in our homes, and so we go rent out storage rooms where we can keep all our stuff.

That’s not what Jesus has in mind. To understand what Jesus means by abundant life, we have to go back, into the previous chapter in fact, to a story about a man born blind and his encounter with Jesus.

- One day, Jesus and his disciples were traveling along a road when they met a man who was born blind.
- Jesus heals the man’s blindness and goes on his way.
- When the man’s neighbors discover he can see, they wonder how this can be? They ask, “Is this even the same man?”
- The Pharisees get wind of this miracle and investigate. They ask the man repeatedly how he was healed, and all the man can tell them is what he knows to be true: “I was blind but now I see.”
- Jesus finds the man again and reveals himself as the “Son of Man,” the Messiah. He tells the man-born-blind Jesus came into the world “so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.”

Now, keep in mind that sight and seeing in this story have a dual meaning. Jesus healed the man physically so that he could view the world around him for the first time. But he also opened his eyes to see that Jesus is the Messiah. This is a spiritual revelation.

When Jesus said, “the blind will see and those who see will become blind,” he was talking about spiritual blindness. In other words, those who think they see God’s will and work are really the blind ones while God reveals Himself to those who can’t see, and their eyes will be opened.

In the story, it’s the Pharisees who are spiritually blind—they don’t see Jesus as the Messiah—while the blind man gets the revelation of Jesus and an invitation to follow him.

With this picture of the now-healed blind man in view, let's come back to what Jesus said about abundant life. What would abundant life look like for him? With open eyes it would mean...a whole new world!

- It meant being released from having to depend on others. No longer would he have to get by on the kindness of strangers, now he could make a living on his own.
- It meant he would be free to move about as he pleased. He could explore the world, take in its beauty, and appreciate the glory of God's good creation.

So, what would abundant life look like for us? I draw on the comments of David Lose, a Lutheran theologian, pastor and teacher, who observed abundant life will look different for each of us depending on our situation:

For the blind man it is sight. For the single parent it might be companionship and help. For the bullied teen it might be acceptance and an advocate. For the impoverished neighborhood it might be dignity and the chance of self-determination. For the retiree, it might be involvement in a worthwhile cause.¹

Abundant life looks different but always comes as a response to whatever seeks to rob us of our life, our reason for being, and our joy.

Here's another important thing about abundant life: It is not about some time in the future; it's not a distant shore, barely discernible on the far horizon; it's not only about life after we get to heaven.

Abundant life is for the here and now, and it is found in relationship, with Jesus Christ, who offers us new life in community...with God and with other travelers on this pilgrim road. The Church of Jesus Christ is also the community of abundant life...or at least it should be. There are times when it has not been a place that gives life, times when the church excluded groups of people, times when it exploited vulnerable people, times when the church went to war (the Crusades). While we have to own that the church does not always live up to its calling, it has its moments when the life of Jesus flows through the church and its people for the healing of others. Above all, abundant life is a gift from Jesus. We cannot earn it. No amount of striving will achieve it. It is enough to come into the presence of Jesus; to have our eyes opened and our ears unstopped; to see the beauty of his face; and, to hear his message, which I paraphrase: "You are special to me. You are unique. You are the one I love. Let me make my life in you. Come, follow me."

This is what makes the imagery of the good shepherd so powerful. The shepherd seeks the good of the sheep. It's not just his job, it's his vocation, his calling, his reason for being. With this image of the shepherd, we understand abundant life all the more.

- The shepherd calls the sheep out in the morning. He does not push them out or herd them with dogs, but calls and they follow, for they know the shepherd's voice.
- The shepherd leads them to green pastures where they feed on what is good for them.
- The shepherd directs them beside the still waters where they can drink and rest, be refreshed.
- In the evening, the shepherd leads them back to the safety of the sheep pen. There the shepherd secures them at night—he becomes the gate—a strange image for us but it refers to a practice among Middle Eastern shepherds where they lie across the entrance to sheep pen to prevent sheep from getting out or predators getting in.

¹ David Lose, "Abundant Life Now," *Working Preacher.org*, May 5, 2014," article on internet, <http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=3198>, accessed 30 April 2020.

In short, the shepherd's life is bound up with the life, the well-being, and the future of the flock. The shepherd is totally devoted to the sheep.

Do you hear that good news? We have a shepherd who is totally devoted to us—Jesus Christ. We know this from the way Jesus lived for us, died for us, and was raised up by God for us on the third day.

“Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.” (John 15:13) Yes, Jesus makes abundant life possible for us. It is a gift from God.

By now you may be wondering what this abundant life will look like for us? It is, after all, different for different people and groups of people. We may be wondering this in our present situation, what with the all the pandemic restrictions we are living under right now: the places we can't go, people we can't be with, the things we can't do. Where is this abundant life Jesus promised?

- Abundant life is found where Jesus is. Jesus said: “Where two or three gather in my name, there I am with them.” If you have Jesus in your heart, the seeds of abundant life are with you.
- Abundant life is removing the obstacles that keep us from fully enjoying life. One day, I don't know when, the “stay at home” order will be rescinded. We will travel freely again—gradually at first, but with no restrictions later.
- We will be with our friends and families again—keeping social distance at first, but gradually drawing closer and being with one another again.
- We will worship together in person again—in small numbers, at first, but eventually in larger groups...and, we'll continue to offer streaming worship, like this, for folks who can't make it to the church building.
- We will be in mission again, helping our neighbors who cannot help themselves—Mission Central, the Food Bank, nursing homes, all these places we've been, and maybe more.

What does abundant life look like for you? What obstacles need to be removed to allow you to experience abundant life in Christ? Pray to Jesus about this, name those obstacles, lift them up to the Lord. Ask Jesus to grant you abundance in the areas of life that are now blocked to you. I believe all these things will come to pass because we have a good shepherd in Jesus Christ who is loving us forward into God's future where we will not just survive, but thrive as a community of faith.

What's even better news today is that Jesus has us. The good shepherd has us firmly in his hands. And we have each other. And together, we will see the other side of the pandemic in the abundance of life that comes to us through Jesus Christ.

Amen.