

Resurrection Abundance

May 3, 2020

Fourth Sunday of Easter

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Acts 2:42-47, I Peter 2:19-25, John 10:1-10

John 10:10 - The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

I Peter 2:He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

Last Sunday - Resurrection Conversations

Dear Christian friends,

How would you fill in the blank? Life is _____

Forrest Gump filled it in this way: Life is like a box of chocolates; you never know what you're going to get. Author F. Scott Peck began his best-selling book, "The Road Less Traveled," by writing, "Life is difficult." A time-share salesman said it this way as he tried to seal the deal, "Life is not a dress rehearsal, you only get to live it once." Others would say that life is what you make it or that life depends on the hand that gets dealt to you or that life is the way the ball happens to bounce or to quote a North Dakota childhood friend, life is however the cookie happens to crumble!

In today's Gospel lesson, Jesus would teach us that life is meant to be abundant. And in today's sermon we would explore the difference between just sort of surviving life and experiencing the abundant Christian life.

Pleasure seekers among us would say that true abundance is in money and all of the happiness money can buy. Workaholics among us would say that true satisfaction is in working hard and achieving all kinds of success. The party crowd would focus on the good times that come along with drinking, status seekers would fix their eyes on climbing the social ladder, busy bees would argue that true abundance is in staying active and getting our to do lists done.

In contrast to all of that, Jesus would teach us today that the truly abundant life is in fact to be in the sheepfold under the protective care of the Good Shepherd, it is for Him to be calling us by name, it is for us to be listening to his voice and to be gathered into his flock and to be made to lie down in green pastures and to be led beside still waters.

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

The thieves and robbers to which Jesus was referring in John 10 were the Pharisees of his day who were blind to the fact that Jesus was in fact the Messiah for whom they had been

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waiting! They were harming the flock by insisting on Old Testament rules and regulations as an entrance to the kingdom of God. They were leading the masses away from the abundant Christian life instead of towards it. Jesus, on the other hand, had come to watch over the flock, to protect the flock, and to lead them safely through present dangers into heavenly joy.

This same Risen Savior would hold us close on this Good Shepherd Sunday. He would look us in the eyes and warn us that the wolves and the thieves and the robbers are still out there. The enemies of our faith really are coming after us every day. There are forces of darkness out there and nearby and even inside of us which would have us chasing after temporary happiness at the expense of eternal joy. The thieves and the robbers come in order to steal and kill and destroy. Jesus comes that we might have not just a little bit of life once in a while but life that is plentiful and full and overflowing in every one of our days.

Today we ask the good Lutheran question, what does this mean? What does Jesus mean when He declares that He came that we might have life and have it abundantly. What does it mean to have Easter victory or resurrection abundance in these days? Three answers to that question I offer.

Resurrection abundance is to live with glad and generous hearts.

Resurrection abundance is to develop an immunity to the enemies of the faith.

Resurrection abundance is to rest safe and secure in the Good Shepherd's flock.

First of all, we learn that **Resurrection abundance is to live with glad and generous hearts.** Acts 2 gives us a picture of an early church that is as healthy as it can be. This description of a continuing fellowship of believers follows immediately after the account of mass conversions and Baptisms. The Holy Spirit had worked in their hearts a gladness and a generosity that found favor with all kinds of folks in Jerusalem. Simply put, they could keep neither their gladness nor their generosity to themselves. They were devoted to the teachings of the apostles, they cared deeply for one another, they spent time enjoying meals together, they began to know the beauty of Holy Communion, they prayed with confidence for the Holy Spirit to lead them into a future God was preparing for them.

Resurrection abundance is to live with glad and generous hearts. This past Sunday morning a member of our church handed me an envelope with all kinds of cash in it, a couple of days ago another member handed me a rather large check, and on Friday, a friend called and indicated that a friend of hers wanted to give me a really large amount of money. In all three cases, these folks wanted me to help people that needed help. It was as simple as that. They were blessed by God, they wanted no credit for themselves, they wished for the love of Jesus Christ to go forward, they wanted all glory to go to God. **I came that they might have life and have it abundantly!**

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Secondly, we learn that **Resurrection abundance is to develop an immunity to the enemies of the faith.** There's a lot of talk about herd immunity in these days of CoVid-19. Herd immunity is defined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention as a situation in which a sufficient proportion of a population is immune to an infectious disease through vaccination and/or prior illness to make its spread from person to person unlikely.

In other words, where herd immunity exists, when lots of people in an area are vaccinated or have already been infected with a disease, fewer people get sick, and fewer germs are able to spread from person to person. The CDC adds that even people who are not vaccinated, like newborn babies and individuals with chronic illnesses, have some level of protection because the disease can't spread within the community. Of course, since there is no vaccine for Covid-19 yet, the only option is recovery, which means letting the majority of people catch the virus at some point.

In today's Epistle Lesson, Peter writes that **He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.** And then he adds, **"By his wounds you have been healed."** Isaiah elaborates that the suffering servant would be wounded for our transgressions, he would be crushed for our iniquities, upon him would be the chastisement that brings us peace, and with his stripes we are healed.

Today I invite you to think of our life together in the Church as developing a herd immunity to the enemies of our faith. In Holy Baptism, the sign of the cross is placed on our foreheads and upon our hearts, and the forgiveness of sins is delivered into our souls. Acts 2:38 - **be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins.** In Baptism, we are rescued from eternal death and the power of the devil himself. Colossians 1, **He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption.** In Baptism, we are born again into the family of God. Peter writes, Baptism, which corresponds to the waters of Noah's flood, now saves you through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The kingdom of God is like thousands of infants in churches large and small across the globe baptized into the Name of the Triune God. A type of herd immunity is built up over time, as moms and dads teach them that Jesus loves them, their grandmas and their grandpas teach them that in every one of their days they can flee for refuge to God who is their very present help in trouble, their pastors and teachers catechize them and guide them into the truths of Scripture, and as the years go on, they know there is safety in the sanctuary of their home churches, they believe with all of their hearts that with God's help there is a way through every one of their trials, they travel through all the seasons of Lent and Easter year after year holding onto the promise that their Good Shepherd is following them around with goodness and mercy, they hold onto the truth that none of their mistakes are so costly that they haven't already been paid for, they hold onto the truth that by the wounds of their Risen Savior, they have been healed.

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Resurrection abundance, dear friends, is first of all to live with glad and generous hearts. Secondly it is to develop an immunity against the enemies of our faith. And third, **Resurrection abundance is to rest safe and secure in the Good Shepherd's flock.** Peter said it this way, **"For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls."**

In John chapter 10, Jesus declares himself not only to be the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep, but also the door through whom the sheep gain access to the pen each night. Here we have a beautiful picture of what congregational life can be here on earth, as we travel through the ups and down of life together. As a good shepherd would know each of his sheep by name, a good pastor will be able to call his members by name and be interested in their stories. As a good shepherd would inspect his sheep for disease and infection day after day, so will congregational life include pastors and members caring for, listening to, encouraging, and praying for one another. As a good shepherd works long hours to find good pastures and still waters and safe places for his sheep, so do pastors and people spend time in God's Word, they are devoted to the teachings of the apostles, they work hard to pass the baton of faith to one generation after another.

I've talked before about my dad and his brothers watching over the family flock back in the sand hills of McLeod, North Dakota, at the edge of the Red River Valley. From May through September, along with a pony and a sheep dog, ages 6 on into teenager years, he would keep the flock together, make sure they didn't get into neighbors' fields, watching over a main source of income for the family. He tells of one time when a thunderstorm scattered the flock, he was afraid, he ran home to get help. It was a huge responsibility, and as far as I know, there was a happy ending.

The kingdom of God is like a young man who has strayed from the faith his parents handed down his way. He has gone his own way, he has sown his wild oats, he has stumbled into all kinds of bad habits, he has harmed family members he claims to love. In these days of virus and loss of income and incredible uncertainty, there is one invitation that is mattering the most to him. Every night, he rests secure in the knowledge that his sins have been paid for and there is safety in his local congregation of believers. Again and again he throws himself on the mercy of His God, again and again what he has learned from his mother's knees settles him down, again and again, he finds the strength to get up the next day and try to get life right. **I have come that they may have life, and have it abundantly.**