

John 10:1-10

Jesus said, “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.”

Sermon on Abundant Life- May 7th, 2017

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Jesus said, “I came that they may have life- and have it abundantly” (John 10:10)

What an exquisite verse.

Jesus's purpose for coming among us was that we might have life-- and might have it *abundantly*.

What does that mean, exactly, though? Abundant life?

If we look through the eyes of our world, we would surely interpret this promise of abundance as being about material extravagance.

Abundance in *our* world is about having more nice *things* in our house, having more great things to wear-- better *cars* to drive-- the newest *iphone* as soon as it comes out-

Some Christians, those who subscribe to a sort of “Prosperity Gospel” spiritualize their craving for “more.” Believing that material wealth is a true measure of how much God is blessing them, these folks pray for God's abundant blessing in their lives... and if they do not end up with the wealth they seek, they think that surely God is not pleased with them!

While all of us like nice things at least to *some* extent, I think we all know Jesus to have been promising something different when he talked about abundant life.

To best reveal what Jesus meant in this little verse, it will help to spend just a little time with the chapter immediately preceding the Gospel passage we just heard. As is so often the case

with the passages we get on a Sunday morning, this segment of John Chapter 10 is part of a larger section.

The larger section begins in chapter 9 where we learn of Jesus healing of a blind man. Today's Gospel passage is taken from the conversation Jesus had with Pharisees whereby Jesus was explaining the miracle they just witnessed.

So let's look back at what it was all about.

The blind man had been blind since birth. He was well-known in the community as one who was seen begging on the street.

People saw him, and what they saw in this blind man was someone who was broken; who was indelibly flawed. Surely this man must have been cursed by God, they thought-

The text actually tells of the disciples asking the question:

"Who *sinned* that he would be born this way-

(Surely- his blindness must have been some sort of punishment)

Jesus' answer was interesting:

"This man was born blind that *God's works* might be revealed *in* him!"

For Jesus, this man's blindness and imperfection was not a death sentence... his blindness was an entry to fuller life!

For Jesus, the *man's* limitations marked the beginning of *God's* strength.

In response, Jesus drew near to the blind man.

Reaching down to the ground, Jesus took mud, and smeared it on his eyes—.

And once the man washed the mud off with water, the blind man's eyes were opened for the first time.

The man could see. And what he saw before him was the face of Jesus. And In the face of Jesus, he could see salvation—

The man he rejoiced— (of course he did, right?)

When others asked who he thought this Jesus was, the man reported that he really, truly believed, in every fiber of his being, that Jesus was the messiah!

Abundance, right?

But now- stay with me- a curious plot turn is about to ensue.

When other people saw that he was healed, they cast him out of his own community. And so, while this man had been *healed of his blindness*... what he now saw with his own eyes were the *backs* of his own community abandoning him-

One might think this would be a place of despair for the man... But it wasn't.

So much in the man's life was STILL very difficult—he may not have even known where his next meal was going to come from!

And yet, in his relationship with Jesus, a gate had been opened for him.

Jesus had led him into a greener pasture...the man had been embraced by a God of love-- and grace, and mercy...

Though his challenges were immense, Jesus had led him into a land of promise—a place of plenty.

There, in the pasture of his Good Shepherd, the man had protection... and provision. This gift, given through Jesus, was—and is—enough.

I'm sure you know people like the blind man: People who suffer from ailments and challenges/ fears and insecurities-- but who also possess a sort of spiritual abundance; an abundance of spirit and peace that surpasses human understanding.

To live in abundance and peace while also suffering through the challenges of today... In a sense, this is the gift of abundant life to which we all aspire.

I think, the truth is that Jesus' promise of abundant life is quite simple. It's a promise that his followers will be given the kind of relationship through Him that makes the difference.

(Jesus didn't promise a magic wand. He didn't promise a fabulous vacation.)

Rather, Jesus simply promised to give what they most need when they need it... all through a living relationship with a God of Life.

Abundant life for us is given in the relationship we have with our Good Shepherd.

Jesus came that we might have life and might have it abundantly.

While our outer nature does grow old and does waste away, we have an immortal identity. We are sons and daughters of God.

Our Good Shepherd knows us... and calls us by name.

As we come to know, and love, and depend on our Good Shepherd, our inner nature is renewed... day by day.

Jesus leads the way to that place where he has already gone, we are given life in him that does *not* fade away.

It's not nice cars, or nice houses, or nice clothes that mark abundant life for us.

No-

We have a Good Shepherd who leads us. He himself is our door to abundant life.

And in him- thanks be to God- we find a peace that surpasses understanding... a peace not of this world... but a peace that calls us home.