

“Life in abundance”

John 10:1-10 (April 30, 2023)



I'd like you to meet a member of our family. His name is Eustace. He belongs to my son and daughter-in-law. Eustace is a bearded dragon, a small lizard native to Australia.



Eustace has it made! He has everything he needs: a warm place to sleep, food (consisting of lettuce, green peas and insects), and people to love. My daughter-in-law, especially, dotes on him.

Sometimes she brings Eustace along to family gatherings. He doesn't do much. Mainly shifts his head to get a different view of things, and blinks. Occasionally at home he'll jump or run a few feet. Sometimes he likes to take a perch on the boot-rack by the front door. Being native to a dry, desert environment, you never know when your next meal might arrive. So best to sit and wait.

A highlight comes every few months when Eustace sheds his skin. This is how scaly reptiles accommodate growth. You can tell when it is coming because he changes colour and his skin begins to crack. Other than that, there's not much that happens in this lizard's life. He eats, he sleeps. When the weather's cold and his body temperature is lower, he sleeps a lot.

All in all, I'd say that Eustace has a pretty good life – for a lizard, that is. But not necessarily for a human. Our human lives are meant to be so much more. If all we do is eat and sleep – that's not much of a life is it?

The Irish writer, Oscar Wilde, once quipped: “To live is the rarest thing in the world. Most people exist, that is all.”¹ So what kind of life are you living? Is it simply existing? Is it a “lizard's life?” Or is it something more?



In our scripture reading, Jesus says: “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.” This is the way the gospel-writer, John, presents Jesus: He comes to give us life.

Thirty-six times we find that word in the Gospel of John, more than any other book in the New Testament. It's there, at the very beginning of the story: “What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.” (John 1:4) And it's there at the end of the story: “These things are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.” (John 20:31)

God loved the world so much, says John, that God gave God's only Son. So that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have ... eternal life! (John 3:16)

Jesus is the bread of life. (John 6:35) Whoever eats it will never be hungry.

¹ <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/2448-to-live-is-the-rarest-thing-in-the-world-most>, Accessed April 30, 2023.

“I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.” (John 11:25-26)

Life. It’s what Jesus came to give us. “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.” But what kind of life? And what does it mean to have it in abundance?



Is Jesus referring to an abundance of things? According to some preachers of the “prosperity gospel” Jesus wants everyone to be blessed with physical and financial well-being. All you need to do is work hard and be faithful. Then ask for whatever you want. God will come through for you: A dream job, a new car, a trip to Orlando. This, and more, can all be yours.



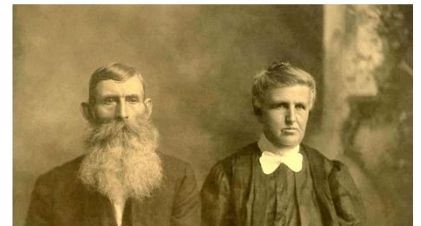
If only it were so simple! Let me remind you that Jesus was never rich, owned a home, or drove a fancy car like this Lamborghini. (It’s too bad, because I love cars.) A humble donkey was good enough for him.

“Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests,” he said, “but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” (Matthew 8:20) Jesus warned us about building bigger barns. Because you never know when your life on earth may end, and what good will all that do you then?

Jesus said it’s easier for a camel to through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God. (Matthew 19:24) So does abundant life mean having a stock-pile of more stuff? I don’t think so.

Well then, does abundant life mean a long life? Or even better, a long and healthy life? Who wouldn’t want a thing like that?

Except we know people who grow old, but aren’t very happy. And we also know people who may have died quite young – perhaps, we thought, before their time – yet their brief span of life was full and oh so glorious!



Abundant life. Here’s how Eugene Peterson puts it in his translation of The Message: “I came so they can have real and eternal life, more and better life than they ever dreamed of.” Real life, more life, better life. Now we’re getting somewhere!

The late Billy Graham described abundant life as life with a capital “L.”² I like that! The capital L sets it apart as being different. It’s not just more of the same old, same old. It’s an expansive life. A life writ large! A life that is growing in relationship with God and others.

Call it “eternal” life. Life that stretches beyond the boundaries of time and space. Because this small world cannot contain it. “Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die,” says Jesus. We shake our heads at that. It blows our human logic away!

This life Jesus is speaking about begins here and now. It’s a life with God on earth that is full and rich and bountiful. It’s the very best kind of life that we can imagine.

² <https://dailyhisdisciple.com/2021/06/30/living-the-abundant-life/>, Accessed April 25, 2023.

And it doesn't end when we die. Somehow, we believe, this God-life goes on. Death does not cut us off from our loving Creator. The abundant life that comes from God continues. It is beyond time. It is eternal.



Maybe another way to think of it is like this: When we attach ourselves to things that really matter, things that God gives us, *kingdom* things, the kind of things we see displayed in the life of Jesus ... they don't fade or disappear. On the contrary, they have enduring effect that goes far beyond our brief span of time.

What kind of things am I talking about? It's not how much money you have in your bank account. It's how you live with other people.



When we love as Jesus loves, it ripples out and causes love to grow in others. It multiplies many times. So our lives become ever more abundant. And the impact of that goes on and on.

Living in Jesus' kingdom way means seeking justice, not only for ourselves, but for our neighbours. So the world becomes a better place for everyone. All receive what is right and equitable and good. No one hoards things for themselves but all share freely in the bounty of God.

We discover abundant life when we live in community, caring for our neighbours. When we serve one another. When we make the circle large enough to encompass strangers and outsiders.

When we forgive one another, seeking healing and reconciliation. When we transcend the divisions that are so prevalent in our world. When we build bridges instead of walls.

When we stand up for right, and work for good, and hope for what is best. These are kingdom things. They are Jesus' things. They are expressions of abundant life.



Indigenous elders remind us to take a long view. Whenever we make decisions, they say, we should think about the impact it has on those who follow – even seven generations down the line. How will my actions affect my children, and their children?



This echoes biblical wisdom. Scripture says “The Lord is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and transgression, but by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children to the third and the fourth generation.” (Numbers 14:18)

The choices we make have long term consequences, whether choices to go our own way, or choices to live God's kingdom way.



Abundant life. Kingdom life. Jesus' life.

Does our congregation have life? Do you wonder about that? Sometimes I think we fret about things too much. We become so anxious about our future – that we fail to see the gifts God has for us in this moment.



When we extend hospitality and welcome to whoever comes in these doors, we are living an abundant life.

When we share the gifts that God has given – our money, our facilities, our time, our talents, our service – we live an abundant life.

When we pray for the world, lending support to those who are suffering wherever they may be, encouraging fledgling congregations in far-away places like Thailand, we are living an abundant life.

When we care for one another in this place: listening, loving and praying, we are living an abundant life. It doesn't come from things we have. It matters not what age we are. It comes as a gift from God in Jesus.

And that last part is crucial. Life with a capital “L,” grows from a relationship with God in Jesus. “*This is eternal life,*” said Jesus, “that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.” (John 17:3)

Abundant life is not something we can achieve or manufacture. It comes as we are drawn deeper into the love of God through the person Jesus. And the deeper we go, the more abundance we discover!



In our reading for today, Jesus is the shepherd and the gate by which we enter. He calls his sheep by name. We hear his voice. And we follow.

There are so many voices promising life in our world. But not all are genuine. “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy.”

Thieves and bandits act out of selfishness and greed. They care little about anyone but themselves. We find them in many places: governments, businesses, local organizations and yes, sometimes even the church.



Are you following Jesus, growing in his love, living in his way? If you are, then you already know something of the abundant life he promises. And the deeper you go in relationship with him, the more abundance and generosity and godness you will discover.



Remember Eustace? I'd say he has a pretty good life ... for a lizard. But that's not the kind of life that *we* are meant to live. Jesus calls his sheep, we hear his voice, and we follow.

“I have come that they may have life, and have it abundantly.” May it be so!

