

April 30, 2023
Acts 2:42-47
John 10:1-10

Jesus has come so we may have life and have it abundantly. He says that the reason he came is so that we can have full life, good life, whole and complete life; not life that is partial or constrained or mediocre. Jesus did not come so we could have a little bit of life. He came so we could have all-surrounding life. That's what the word abundant means in Greek. The word, perisson, Peri—as in perimeter or periscope. It means all about-ness, all around-ness and extending out beyond-ness. Wherever you look, there it is. It means plentiful, abundant, more than enough, even extravagant. Think of it; Jesus came so that we could have life extravagantly. Life that is plentiful, life that extends all the way out to the edges. Do we believe that? Do we believe God wants life for us that is full and whole. Life that is alive. Life that is not empty or dead, that is not made up of despair or shame or guilt. But life that is good and rich and full and goes in every direction.

Jesus wants us to have that kind of life. And today he is teaching his disciples that this is his mission and goal. That he will lead them there

because he is the good shepherd. And the good shepherd knows his own sheep and his sheep know him. They recognize his voice and they follow him. They don't follow the other voices out there. Because they won't lead them to life. The other voices want to sell you a cheaper, paper-thin life. All the other voices on the TV and radio and on social media sell us a lifestyle; they sell us products and escape hatches. The voices of our culture, our community; our neighbors, they want us to fit in and share their story. The voices at work of our boss, our buyer, our principal or teacher, telling us to work harder, to do all we can to be successful. And the voices in our own head; whispering our worries, repeating our fears of how lousy we are, how unworthy; how undeserving. The voices are everywhere, all around. They are abundant. And they don't give us life. They steal life.

Jesus says, I have come that you may have life and have it plentifully, fully, completely. Not partially or conditionally or every once in a while. I want to give you life. Life that is hopeful and joyful and free. I want to give you life; not take it, like other gods. I don't want sacrifices. I don't want you to destroy your life or the lives of others. I won't demand it

from you like some self-serving leaders who only care about themselves. They are only in it for themselves. They don't care about you. They don't care about your life." Jesus was speaking of the religious leaders of his day. The Pharisees, scribes and priests who were not good shepherds. Who used their power to scare people, to intimidate them, to fleece them. Who used threats of condemnation and God's disapproval to take away joy and hope. What they offered in abundance was distrust, resentment, and life lived in fear. These supposed shepherds get Jesus' harshest words because they aren't protecting the sheep like they are supposed to. But Jesus has come to protect them. He has come to give them life, full life, abundant life. And they will know the voice of a GOOD shepherd when they hear it.

Jesus tells his disciples to listen for the voice that gives life to the sheep. Listen for the voice of the shepherd who lays down his life to protect them. He doesn't abandon them to the wolves; or let them be stolen by thieves. The good shepherd guards the sheep. The good shepherd gives them safety and security and boundaries. He set up limits and puts a fence around us. I am the gate, Jesus says. I protect you. You can come

and go and your life will be secure. Nothing will sneak in to steal you away. I will stand in the opening. I will stand in the gap for you. I am the gate that will keep bad stuff out and good stuff in.

The good shepherd wants us to have life. He wants us to live freely without fear. He wants us to live beyond shame. He wants us to feel safe. And to trust that he isn't going to abandon us or run out on us. He will take care of us. But we must listen to HIS voice. Not the other voices out there. Or in here. Not the voices of blame and hatred. Not the voices that degrade our lives. Not the voices that degrade the lives of others. But the voice that gives life abundantly.

Last week, I was out for an evening walk, and I met Logan Nance coming from the refugee house on South Turner St. This is the same house where we hosted five families from Afghanistan in 2022. Logan told me he had gotten a call from KY Refugee Ministries asking if it could be an emergency shelter for a mom from Congo and her three children. Their current situation was dangerous and they needed a safe place right away. I asked if I could go by the next day to check on them. And he said yes. So, I went with a few groceries and our microwave

from the church because they needed one. The family had very little with them and very little in the fridge. I asked what they needed, and I was really impressed when the oldest girl who was about 6 said they needed broccoli. And spinach. And carrots. We made a list. And I grabbed as much as I could from my own house. And went shopping for the rest. But I worried. I doubted. I fretted about loaning them the church microwave. “What if I got in trouble? What if people didn’t like me helping them? What if they got upset because the church doesn’t have the resources to be doing this? What if it caused “conflict”-- my least favorite word? The voices in my head kept circling with fear and worry. But the next day, I got a message from the mom of this family. “Hey, Mary. I just want to thank you. God bless you and your family. I wish you more life and more blessings. The world needs more people like you.” Her words were the voice of the good shepherd, reminding me of everything Jesus said.

Jesus came so that we may have life and have it abundantly. And he wants us to have it. Today. Right now. Jesus wants us to live in joy and peace and hope. He wants us to trust that when we listen to him and

follow him, he will provide. When we listen to love, we will be safe.

When we listen to mercy, we will be filled. With life that is good and whole and plentiful, that is all-encompassing and all-surrounding.