

The Fourth Sunday of Easter
May 14-15, 2011
John 10:1-10

“Abundant Life”

Abundant life – we all want it and dream about it. We may even have a plan in place that we’re actively pursuing to get our hands on this abundant life. But what does it look like? Depending on who you talk to, it might be having the dream job with all the plush benefits, enjoying good health, the right house in the right neighborhood, having plenty to eat, no money worries, and few troubles to disturb us. Maybe that’s the abundant life in those lush “green pastures” and pleasant “still waters” we heard of in Psalm 23. But when all is said and done, will these things be what satisfy and fill us? Will they bring us that peace of mind and contentment that is so central to the abundant life? It’s interesting to read about the lives of those who are fabulously rich. To be sure, they face a whole set of challenges that most of us will never experience, but many of these people have learned – sometimes the hard way – that the abundant life is not found in material things or worldly possessions. Whether we have a lot or a little, that truth speaks to us all. So, what does the abundant life look like? Jesus tells us at the close of today’s Gospel lesson: **“I came that they may have life and have it abundantly”** (John 10:10). It is this abundant life in Jesus our Good Shepherd that is the focus of today’s message. May the Lord’s rich blessing rest upon the preaching, the hearing, and the living of his Word, for Jesus’ sake.

“Life” is one of the central themes in John’s Gospel, and the apostle uses this term more than any other New Testament writer. This life centers in Jesus. Think back to Christmas, now nearly five months ago. The Gospel lesson always appointed for Christmas Day is John 1:1-14, which ends with this profound truth: **“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth”** (John 1:14). But earlier on in the opening words of John’s Gospel, we also are told that **“In him was life, and the life was the light of men”** (John 1:4). If we want to know what life is all about – not selfish, stingy, grasping life, but the full and abundant life that God intends for his people, then we must look to Jesus. Two weeks ago, our Gospel lesson focused on the risen Savior and his appearing to the disciples and to Thomas, whose doubt that Jesus had risen from the dead was transformed into living faith. This account ends with these words: **“Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name”** (John 20:30-31). Life in Jesus is the beginning and the end of John’s concerns; it is the first and last thing he writes about. Life in Jesus means fellowship with him and with the Father who sent him.

We can confuse the abundant life that Jesus offers with what the world offers. Don’t be deceived! What the world offers will be temporary at best and deceitful at worst. Will the world give us what Jesus gives? *Can* the world give us what Jesus gives? **“He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls”** (1 Peter 2:24-25). The abundant life which Jesus came to bring is not only about eternal life in heaven, important as this is. As Peter tells us, it’s also about the here and now: **“... so that free from sins, we**

might live for righteousness.” In Jesus our Good Shepherd, we begin to see heaven here and now. In Jesus our Good Shepherd, we begin to experience here and now that abundant life he came to bring. We get a picture of what this looks like in today’s First Reading (Acts 2:42-47): **“They (the disciples) devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers... All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people.”**

Jesus our Good Shepherd is also Jesus the door of the sheep. What does this mean? A man named Eric Bishop wrote many years ago of traveling by donkey in Iran from the east to the west. This was in the days before travel by car or plane, and in that part of the world it was by donkey. He and his traveling companions stopped in a tiny village for the night. They woke up next morning to a snow-covered landscape, and the donkey driver stated that it was impossible to go further until the snow melted a bit. So they remained in the village that day. Eric Bishop writes about what he saw: “In the afternoon I set out to see the sight about the village. Not far away I came to a mound of earth piled up in a large circle, like a crude rampart, and on the top of the mound all around the circle was a heap of dry thorns. As I stood wondering what this might be one of the villagers approached me. ‘Salaam,’ I said, ‘please tell me what this enclosure is for.’ ‘Oh, that is for the sheep,’ he replied. ‘They are brought in here for the night for safety.’ ‘Good,’ I said, ‘but why have the dry thorns been piled on top of the wall.’ ‘That,’ he replied, ‘is a protection against wolves. If a wolf tries to break in and attack the sheep, he will knock against the thorns, and they will make a noise, and the shepherd will wake up, and drive off the wolf.’ ‘That is fine,’ I said, ‘but why does the wolf try to climb over the wall? Here is the entrance to the enclosure; it is open. There is no door to keep out the wolf; he could easily enter here.’ ‘Oh, no,’ said my guide, ‘you do not understand. That is where the shepherd sleeps, the shepherd is the door.’ And then I understood something that had often puzzled me. It became clear to me why Jesus had in John 10 called himself first the Door and then immediately the Shepherd. Since he is the Shepherd he is also the Door” (*An Easter Sourcebook – The Fifty Days*, Liturgy Training Publications, 1988, pp. 80-81).

The abundant life God so desires to give each one of us and to all the world is found in him who is both Shepherd and Door, Jesus Christ. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen.