

4 Easter; May 15, 2011

Rev Ken Wratten

Acts 2:42-47

1 Peter 2:19-25

John 10:1-10

The ideal Christian community

By his wounds we are healed

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

Jesus said; “I have come that they may have life, and that they may **have it more abundantly.**”

This is a statement worth our stopping to examine closely, to reflect on, internalize, and live out. Yes, Jesus died for our sins, and reconciled us to God. Yes, Jesus promised us eternal life. But Jesus **ALSO** said very clearly that he came to show us how to live an abundant life. Do you feel like that “abundance” describes your life? That is what Jesus wants for us, and offers us.

Jesus offers us two attributes of life:

In quantity, he offers eternal life - forever

In quality, he offers abundant life – starting right now

Eternal life comes instantly, starting the moment we give ourselves to Jesus and believe in him.

If you have already done that, you are promised eternity with God.

Abundant life takes longer, because it comes through learning Jesus’ voice; it comes from shaping our lives to follow his example; it comes from being intentional about living in a state of Grace.

### **There are Five elements to an abundant life:**

#### **Element 1: an abundant life is a yielded life.**

Paul describes a choice every follower of Jesus has to make. (Romans 6: 14)

*...offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life.*

We either yield ourselves to God, or we give in to the world. We give up our personal will to do God’s will, or we let ourselves be pulled through life based on the values of the world. I see people cheating other people so they can live the high life; I see wars waged to ensure ongoing profits from oil; I see politicians pass laws that reduce our benefits, but the lawmakers are excluded from the laws they pass for us. I do not see that the values of the world are good enough to commit my life to. By yielding to what God wants, which we can understand from what Jesus taught us, we will be doing what pleases God. That gives very high value to my life.

It is for this purpose that we yield the life of this faith family to support our Sudanese students in Kenya; it is why we collect, sort, and distribute clothing to the homeless; it is why we volunteer time at St Julie’s Food Pantry and Santa Maria Urban Ministries; and why I go to Tanzania to see what connections might come from that country. You and I constantly practice yielding to God’s will.

#### **Element 2: Abundant life is a life of service with Christ as our model.**

(Romans 12:1,2)

*...by the mercies of God, present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.*

You and I practice hospitality for each other, and we do works of ministry and mission, and we pray for each others' needs; not to earn points with God, or to impress other people. We enter into these activities as forms of worship to God. We live the abundant life when we decide to do everything in an attitude of worship.

**Element 3:** Abundant life is **set apart**.

We Christians are NOT like everybody else. We are set apart for God's special purpose. In Romans 1:1, Paul says that he is 'set apart **for the gospel** of God'; and so are we. And as St. Francis wrote, we are to preach the gospel always, using words if necessary. The Gospel, the Good News, is that through Christ dying on the cross, God has placed us into a new covenant with Him, making all things new. You and I are set apart to demonstrate that relationship with God to the rest of the world, by the way we live.

**Element 4:** Abundant life is **Spirit-filled**.

(Ephesians 5:18b-21)

*...be filled with the Spirit, speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs.*

Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Our spiritual nature will wither if we don't use it; like forgetting how to solve a math problem (I have no idea anymore how to calculate square roots long hand). We need prayer and song and fellowship to awaken our spiritual nature; to feel it being alive within us; and to make it grow stronger. Can't you feel the truth of being spirit-filled when we sing about God? When we accomplish something good for someone without expecting any reward? When we help someone else become a person of faith, or to grow in their faith?

**Element 5:** Abundant life is a **constantly maturing** life

(Ephesians 3:17b-19) Here is what Paul says about seeking a more mature faith:

*May your roots go down deep into the soil of God's marvelous love. And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love really is. May you experience the love of Christ, though it is so great you will never fully understand it. Then you will be filled with the fullness of life and power that come from God.*

We can physically feel the abundant life in us when we keep growing in the depth of our relationship with God. It brightens our outlook, lightens our load, and encourages us when we engage in prayer and study and fellowship that are anchored in experiencing the faith life God wants for us. We should never be too busy, or too old to seek learning more.

So; what does an abundant life look like?

An abundant life is yielded to God

An abundant life is a life of service as an act of worship

An abundant life is set apart for God's purpose

An abundant life is Spirit-filled

An abundant life is constantly maturing

When we dedicate ourselves to living this abundant life, our Good Shepherd Jesus Christ helps us in developing qualities that are good for us, and he frees us from negative attitudes that rob us of the fulfilling life that God wants us to enjoy.

You ARE in abundant life through your decision to be part of a faith community; part of THIS faith community. The commitment we make here is to provide for each other an environment for abundant life to thrive. The question for you is; do you recognize the abundant life around you?

Do you seek it;

do you claim it;

do you share with other people what it is like?

Jesus promises to lead you and me into this abundant life: he is the gateway. Follow him; study his voice; and claim the abundant life he wants for you. Amen.