

Epworth Chapel on the Green  
April 29, 2012  
Fourth Sunday of Easter  
Rev. Dr. Brook Thelander

Acts 4:23-37  
Psalm 100  
I John 3:1-8  
John 10:11-18

Our Gospel lesson today from John chapter 10 begins at verse 11, but it really should begin one verse earlier at verse 10, because verse 10 anchors the entire passage. Do you remember what Jesus says in verse 10?

He says: *The thief comes to steal, to kill, and to destroy; I have come that you might have life, and have it abundantly.*

Abundant life. That phrase, perhaps more than any other in the Bible, captures what most people we know -- including ourselves -- long for. We don't long for *more or longer* life. We hunger for *abundant* life. We don't always want more *stuff* -- we want *real* life, abundant life. And in this text, Jesus makes a grand promise. It is a life-changing promise. A promise of life that is abundant.

Jesus is not the only one making promises, however. If you've had your tv, radio, or computer on recently, you know what I mean. We are bombarded with ads, and most of the ads we're subjected to also promise us abundant life. Usually, though, it is abundance that is defined in terms of *more* -- more money, more

possessions, more sex, more Facebook friends -- more, more, more. You can fill in the blanks as well as I can.

There is a price to pay if you buy into the message of these ads, however. First, you need to believe that you are insufficient, that you are not good enough, that you have not done enough. You are not worthy of love and respect and happiness unless you purchase what is being advertised to you. Ads work to create in us a sense of lack, a sense of insufficiency. And the only way to satisfy that lack is to buy the product in question.

And the second thing about these ads is that they are a lie. Whatever you buy -- sneakers, iPads, cars, deoderant, whatever -- may be just great in and of themselves. But those things will not fill that sense of need or rid you of that sense of lack. You'll be disappointed, and will probably look for the next thing that promises to meet this burning need.

Against this backdrop, hear again these words from Jesus: *I have come that you might have life, and have it abundantly.* But Jesus doesn't just make a promise here. He puts his money where his mouth is. More accurately, he puts his *life* where his promise is. He says: "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."

We might ask, why? Why has the good shepherd laid down his life for the sheep? Answer: To tell us, in fact, that we *are* enough. If you look closely at

what Jesus does in John's gospel, you will discover that John's Jesus doesn't die in order to make some kind of payment to God, or to satisfy God's wrath, or to pay the penalty for sin. In John's gospel, Jesus is the *Revealer*, the One who comes to make the invisible God visible to us, to make the unapproachable God accessible to us. Jesus comes to reveal that God loves the whole world, no exceptions. *Jesus comes to tell us that we are already beloved, that we are enough, that we don't need money or status or things or reputation or career or list of achievements or anything else to be deserving of God's love.* When it comes to God's unending and unconditional love -- we've already got that. It is ours.

But it can be hard to believe this sometimes. The bulk of messages that come to us constantly, day after day after day, whisper and shout to us that we are *not* enough, that we are *not* worthy of love, that we need to *earn* acceptance. Our challenge is to name these messages a lie, and to remind one another of the good shepherd who lays down his life for us out of pure love.

Part of being the body of Christ is that we are here for one another, and we remind and encourage one another to listen to Jesus' voice, not the voice of our culture.

In a moment we are going to come to the Lord's table. As we do, let me ask you a question. When you come to the table and you hold your hands open to receive the bread, what do you have in your hands? Nothing, right? You bring

yourself to the table, your open hands and open heart. Nothing with you or within you that in any way implies you could ever merit or earn what you are about to receive. Why is that? Because the love and grace and mercy you receive here cannot be earned. It is freely given.

How do we respond to such love? By opening up our hands and hearts and giving it away. By reminding one another and all who will listen that the meaningful life we seek is not found *out there* in more things, but in the One who lays down his life for us and who says, "I have come that you might have life, and have it in abundance."

So come with faith. Receive all that Christ offers you this day. Then keep your hands and hearts open, and freely give it away.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

[I am indebted to Dr. David Lose for much of the content of this message; cf. *WorkingPreacher.org*, 4/22/2012]