

The Sacred Journey: *Abundant Life*

Biblical Text: John 10: 7-10

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I suppose I was about nine years old when I entered through the big brass elevator doors in the lobby of City Hall and went up thirty floors to the observation deck. In one magical moment, I took in the city. It was breathtaking. My heart pounded in my chest, I felt like I could see forever.

Of course it wasn't forever – *it was just Kansas City!* But for that fleeting moment, I was fully alive. I have never forgotten.

There have been equally breathtaking moments since. Maybe there have been for you. *I hope, I pray, there have been for you.*

But too much of life isn't like that. Most our lives are spent in the "*moments between*" those moments when we feel genuinely alive.

But I am convinced it doesn't have to be that way. I want to suggest some ways God can lead us to life this morning. But first, I want to pray.

*Today, O God, speak to someone's heart! Renew someone's faith!
Restore someone's hope! Bring joy! Bring rebirth! Resurrect us from
anything less than what you intended - into life! In Jesus' name. Amen.*

The late Dr. Bruce Thielemann said his life and his ministry was forever changed when he picked up one of those "*In Flight*" magazines on a flight one day on his way back to Pittsburg.

It featured an interview with world-class surfer, Philip Edwards, who said this: "*...millions of people right now are going through life without any sort of real vibrant kick. I call them 'The legions of the unjazzed.'*"¹

"*The legions of the unjazzed."* Isn't that a provocative phrase? Dr. Thielemann said that he knew that God wanted more for him than that!

I think God wants more for me, more for you, more for all of us than that.

¹ From Dr. Bruce Thielemann's sermon "*The Legions of the Jazzed*." Dr. Thielemann (1934-1994) was long time senior pastor of First Presbyterian Church, Pittsburgh, Pa, and a vibrant, engaging preacher.

I think that's what Jesus was getting at in our text, in John 10:10 when he said, *"I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."*²

I love the King James Version, no longer the most accurate translation. But sometimes the King James Version got it right. This is one of them.

It reads this way, *"I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly."*³

If you are ever in a Bible Study on this passage with me, I will probably let you know that the words we translate "more abundantly" are from the New Testament Greek *"perissos"* (per-is-sos') which is a superlative meaning "super-abundant," or as I said my first Sunday, "more, more."

Alternatives to "more abundantly" are "beyond measure," "over and above," even more than that overworked current word "awesome."

Imagine for a moment that you could have all the "more" that your heart desires. What would be on the list?

More income? A better job? A better marriage? Better kids or parents? More possessions? More (or better) health? More happiness?

More things, more or better stuff? House, cars, guitars, tools, clothes, shoes? Whatever floats your boat. *Since we just moved this year, Ann will remind me at lunch that I do not need more of any of those things.*

What about lofty hopes and dreams? More peace in the world, more hungry children fed? More harmony and less division? More solutions and less rhetoric? More wins and fewer losses for our favorite baseball team?

What? To whatever we can imagine, God says "even more than that!"

Using the same word as John 10:10, Ephesians 3:20 promises that God is *"...able to do immeasurably (superabundantly) more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us."*⁴

But God's "more, more" is also usually "more, different."

² John 10:10b. *The New Revised Standard Version*. Copyright © 1989, 1995. Used by permission.

³ John 10:10b. *The King James Version*. The KJV is in the public domain in the United States of America.

⁴ Ephesians 3:20. *The New International Version®*. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.

That's the catch, the rub, the requirement in this Biblical promise. If you listened carefully, you caught it. It is only through God's power at work in us that we can claim God's promise.

And that's not easy. That requires choices on our part.

Isaiah 55:2 says, *"Why do you spend money for what does not lead to life? Or your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and receive what is good. Then you will delight yourself in abundance."*⁵

In our search for happiness, fulfillment, joy, achievement, we often leave God out of the equation. We forget that God has called us to live with joy and delight in loving relationship with Him and with other people!

May I admit that sometimes I have forgotten that? [I guess I just did!](#)

But when I forget, when you forget, outside we may be living, but inside we are often dying, day by carefully scheduled day.

Many of us work like crazy to build a secure future for people we care about, but don't take time enjoy who they are today.

We spend our energy on the past, in worry, regret, anger or grief, and waste the precious gift of life.

We spend our time making a living, or keeping one, and forget to make a life! When we do that, we let life, real life, abundant life, slip away from us.

I just don't believe that is God's intention.

In his book with Keith Miller, twenty years ago, called "The Edge of Adventure", Bruce Larson says this, *"our greatest sin is not breaking God's immutable law... ..but failing to discover the adventure God has designed at the very heart of living!"*⁶

And in case you haven't picked up the theme in this first sermon series, that's what I am after in what I have called *"The Sacred Journey."*

⁵ Isaiah 55:2. Paraphrased by the author.

⁶ The Edge of Adventure, Keith Miller and Bruce Larson. Copyright © 1991, Fleming H. Revell Co.

If you missed one of the messages, the texts are available in the office and on our website. Audio files will follow. (They are not great, but we're fixing that that starting today.) *How many of you are happy about better sound?*

First, our life begins and ends with God. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, *"Anyone in Christ is a new creation: the old is gone. All things become new!"*⁷ We were created in God's image, to experience "abundant life." But without His life in us we stumble and fall. It's where real life begins.

In my second message I told you this, *"Before you can throw deep, you have to grow deep."* Sound familiar? And the way we grow deep in God is through God's amazing grace. Ephesians 2:8-9: *"It is by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God; not by works, so that no one can boast."*⁸

And if those things are true, and I believe they are... And if they are true for you, and they either are or you hope they can be... You are here...

Then I have a deeper question for you this morning.

"What path do you need to take that will lead you to life?"

Another way of asking the same question is this,

"What door do you need to go through to take your life to the next level?"

I am not talking about simplistic, greeting card religion answers. You've heard them. Shoot, I've even preached them sometimes. Like this one:

"One day at a time, sweet Jesus..." Well, that's true, and it helps us not become so enmeshed in worry about the future that we melt down today.

But, no matter what Kris Kristofferson wrote and sang and a thousand people have repeated - ultimately that's just not enough.

I'm pointing us toward something more basic, more profound. I am asking all of us to ask of ourselves, what is going on in me that infuses my life with fulfillment? What is my passion?"

Or, as Joseph Campbell put it, *"What is your bliss?"*

⁷ Op. Cit. 2 Corinthians 5:15. Paraphrased by the author.

⁸ Op. Cit. Ephesians 2:8-9. *New International Version.*

Here's what I believe. I believe that when our deepest passions are known and expressed in our lives, in the context of our faith in Christ, we can discover the power to become what God has created us to be.

You'll discover my passions if you haven't yet. They are as much a part of me as my name. I'm thinking of having my business cards reprinted:

On one side: *Michael Gardner - Old cars, fly-fishing and vintage guitars.*

The other: *Michael Gardner - Ann's husband, and excellent grandpa dude.*

But every other passion of my life pales in comparison to my deepest passion. For me, my God-given passion is to point people to this vibrant thing Jesus called "*abundant life.*"

I love my job as Senior Pastor. I hope that shows. That my passion and job coincide is a blessed and wonderful thing. But I would fulfill my passion even if I were a diesel mechanic or worked in a music store!

So what is your passion? I believe that answer can only come from inside of us, and through our relationship to God through Christ. Parker Palmer said, "*Our deepest calling is to grow into our authentic selfhood, whether or not it conforms to someone's image of who we ought to be.*"⁹

Our parents, spouses, bosses, our friends, our society have ideas. They might sound good, but their idea may not be it. We must get down into genuine selfhood, who we really are; what we were created by God to be.

And it's not the same as our job, or what our job used to be. We can fulfill our God-given passion vocationally or avocationally.

The question is how do we get there? And I have some answers.

First of all we have to discover a relationship with the God who made us.

Second we have to be honest enough to know ourselves.

Third we have to make ourselves available to God.

Frederick Buechner, who has one of the most insightful, practical minds of any age, said that our calling is "*...where our deep gladness meets the world's deep need.*"¹⁰ I like that. And I believe that.

⁹ Parker J. Palmer, Let Your Life Speak, Copyright © 2000, Jossey-Bass, Inc. *Now I Become Myself*, pgs. 9-22.

¹⁰ Fredrick Buechner, Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC, Copyright © 1993, HarperOne, Inc.

But here's the thing. **We never truly discover that on our own.**

We need other Christians, with whom we "do life" to discover that. Spending time with young adult taught me that. Our relationships are everything. And there are four things we do in Christian community that are indispensable to discovering or uncovering the abundant life.

Worship.

If you are not in one of our three services regularly you need to be. Ruth Bell Graham said: *"Worship is for the Christian what oxygen is to fire."*

Group Life with other Christians.

Sunday School or a small mid-week group in someone's home. Not just study, although that is important. I am talking about "doing life together." Praying with other Christians. Growing deeper. If you are not in a group you need to be. We'll be offering some new options for that this fall.

Service.

We have to live missionally. Giving is part of that. But so is serving with other Christians. We do lots of missional things and we need to do more! But we also need to help you get involved in using your talents, in your daily work, in your areas of gifting for God. That's where amazing things happen in our spiritual growth. Look for more of that in the days to come!

Give it away.

We have to learn to give it away to those who don't yet know that Christian life can be amazing. Otherwise, what will people say when they find out that you are a Christian? Will they say *"Seriously?" "Really?"* Or will they say, *"Yeah, I can tell."* I want them to be able to tell.

I am going to be bold enough to ask you to do those four things. In fact I am going to expect you to do those four things. All of them.

If you will, I promise, your life will explode with meaning. And we'll discover, as a Church, the next level of our life together.

Most of all, we'll discover what it means to be truly alive. Not living in the valley between the peaks. Not un-jazzed, but jazzed!

Jesus said, *"I have come that you may have life."*