

John 10:1-10

Today's Gospel reading is the tail-end of a bigger story.

A man is born blind and Jesus heals him. What's thrown into the early part of the story is that the disciples still believe that the blindness is as a result of sin and Jesus deals with that; it's not. The man's blindness and what Jesus does, displays the goodness of God.

The healing happens on the Sabbath so the Pharisees investigate and the situation starts to escalate.

They interview the man who says that the healer must be a prophet.

They don't believe the man was really blind...so they drag in his parents who don't want to get in any trouble with the authorities.

They confirm it's their son and that he was blind but they have no idea how it is he can now see.

So they question the man again and it gets pretty heated.

(John chapter 9)

"Give glory to God by telling the truth," they said. "We know this man is a sinner." (They mean Jesus)

<sup>25</sup> He replied, "Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!"

<sup>26</sup> Then they asked him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?"

<sup>27</sup> He answered, "I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples too?"

<sup>28</sup> Then they hurled insults at him and said, "You are this fellow's disciple! We are disciples of Moses!"<sup>29</sup> We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from."

<sup>30</sup> The man answered, "Now that is remarkable! You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. <sup>31</sup> We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly person who does his will.<sup>32</sup> Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. <sup>33</sup> If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."

<sup>34</sup> To this they replied, "You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!" And they threw him out.

Jesus hears that the man has been thrown out, so goes and finds him. They talk, and the man comes to believe in Jesus. Jesus is overheard by the Pharisees saying (free translation)

*I came into the world to bring everything into the clear light of day, making all the distinctions clear, so that those who have never seen will see, and those who have made a great pretence of seeing will be exposed as blind.*

Then the final part of this three-act situation takes place, the reading we had today. Jesus speaks to the Pharisees and does so in riddles, so much so that some end up saying he's mad...but others are intrigued and want to know more.

In the illustration there's a gate, a gatekeeper and a (shortly afterwards) a Shepherd and Jesus claims to be all three! I told you it was a riddle.

How to understand it? How to interpret it?

Start at the end. **I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.** An abundant life. An eternal life.

Being able to come and go through the gate is living life in and through Jesus. The abundant life is the abundance of Shalom, not just peace, but peace and provision and security and wellbeing. Eternal life has already begun.

The Shepherd leads the sheep and cares for them. Had we read the Psalm today it would have been Psalm 23 – the Lord's my Shepherd I'll not want, he makes me lie down in green pastures and leads me beside still waters.

The Shepherds whole devotion is caring for and providing for the sheep, not to steal and kill and destroy. The Psalm Jesus infers is a psalm of peace and plenty – abundant living.

Jesus is also the gate-keeper. He gives security and protection and all who enter by him are saved.

Here's a question. Would you describe your life as life to the full? Is it a life of abundance?

The life that Jesus promises doesn't include exemption from ill-health, or financial problems, stressful work situations, relationship issues or bereavement or any and every one of the things that cause us worry.

So if any of those things are troubling us currently, we are not failures or steeped in sin since birth, because Jesus never said that once we believe everything is going to be fine and dandy.

The abundant life is a life in his presence. What transforms our life experience and reframes how we experience the problems we

have is our relationship with God, through Jesus and through the presence of the Holy Spirit.

For a very short while a new kind of abundant life was glimpsed and we read about it in Acts. *They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching, to being a community, to eating together – both meals and the eucharist, and to prayer.*

The coming of the Spirit allowed the church to blossom and a new kind of community was born and one could easily describe it as abundant. It was wonderful. It didn't last like that for long...even by the time of the end of the book of Acts it's settled down somewhat, but there is a vision of a different way of living.

We are called to express that in our own way and in our generation. For example, how we use our wealth. In an essay on this passage Timothy Hore asks his congregation these questions about giving.

Remember we gave to Child Action Lanka in Lent. We give to the hardship fund. We give to fund the work of this church. Are we reflecting the values of the kingdom and an abundant life.

Does it heal or does it harm?

Does it bring hope or not?

Does it remake a part of the world so people can rebuild their lives?

Does our giving mean we are participating in the transforming work of God.

I believe the answers are YES.

We also have our building. At the heart of transforming the church (I'll say more at the APCM) is the desire to create a place of teaching, fellowship, sharing meals, prayer and much more beside. A place of outstanding welcome and participation, of real

love and forbearance. A place of healing and hope and rebuilding and transformation. A sign of God's Kingdom and abundant life.

We are doing this already, we want to extend it much much further.

Now you might be saying well that's great Jon as a church – but if I'm being honest, I wouldn't describe my life as abundant right now.

What is it I'm getting wrong?

Well – if anyone thinks that life is difficult because of sin we can remove that! 'Til on that cross, as Jesus died, the wrath of God was satisfied and every sin on him was laid, here in the death of Christ, I live. Our sins are forgiven.

The problem comes because we think of ourselves as human beings having a spiritual experience. We're not. We're spiritual beings having a human experience, and the human experience seeks to dominate, so we try to fix things ourselves and keep control and a great many of us are specialists at worrying because as we all know the more we worry about something the more likely it is to get sorted out. (NOT)

To grow into a life of abundance is to learn to surrender and continually surrender to God, letting everything go to Him. To seek his will, to live in his will, to want his presence.

It's not a quick fix answer...it's a lifetime journey which is why doing this in fellowship is so important. But the more we let go into his presence, the more we see and experience things in a different way and the more joy and peace become ours.

**Rev. Jon Hutchinson, 30 April 2023**