

Scripture and Sermon for Sunday, May 7, 2017

Acts 2:42-47

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. 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. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

John 10:1-10

[Jesus said:] "Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers." Jesus used this figure of

speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

So again Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."

Let us pray...Amen.

To have life, and have it abundantly, is a gift. But the real challenge is discerning the difference between quantity and quality, isn't it?

Our Acts passage describes a way of life that is abundant in spirit, in worship, and in fellowship. It does not sound like there is an abundance of food, or riches, or things.

So what is 'Abundant Life'?

If we are alive, we have life. But what does it mean for Jesus to provide us with life, abundantly? And could that be related to the way the disciples lived in the days following Jesus' resurrection?

Could be.... 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.

That sounds like abundant life to me...

There may be a place in this world for a good deal, for the cheap and plentiful meal, for the buy one, get one free model, for the all you can eat buffet, but that concept rarely applies to the spiritual life, the worshipful life, the life based on love and fellowship. The buffet approach to life can

be overwhelming to the mind, the body, and the soul: you know, too much of a good thing...

Moderation in all things may be a more prudent approach to life, even abundant life.

In the days that followed the resurrection, the disciples were moved to live in a certain way that prioritized worship in the temple, and fellowship at the table. Worship and Fellowship. Why was that? What moved them to be so gracious and generous in their hearts?

And in our own lives, where do we experience an abundance of life? It may take some time to reflect on our abundance, but it would be time well spent. Where does Jesus bring us life abundantly? And, perhaps a more difficult question, where do we opt for the abundance of stuff over the abundance of life offered to us by our Lord and Savior? Where do we head for the all you can eat buffet instead of the less filling but more satisfying spiritual food?

Because there is something about human nature that just can't seem to pass up a good deal, right? I don't know why it holds such a great attraction, but it does. And it takes a tremendous amount of self-control to choose the abundance of worship, spirit, and fellowship over the abundance of the buy one, get one free, or the free cruise you get with each car purchased from the Fucillos...

But you know what I mean, right? The tension that builds when you know you are going to choose quantity over quality, for whatever reason, and there are so many reasons! We're tired, we're hungry, we're lonely, we're angry, we're sad, we're hurt...the list of reasons why we choose quantity over quality are as numerous and varied as we are.

And most days, I think we choose quantity.

Those who lived through the depression often choose quantity over quality because you never know when you're not going to have enough. In fact, science has shown us that the human body is uniquely built to accept a huge amount of calories in one sitting, because one never knows when a famine might hit. This characteristic may be one of the ways humanity survived the most challenging of times.

Subsequent generations choose quantity over quality because it's so available, it's right there! You can have it your way, you deserve it...

What we often fail to realize is that the consequences of living a quantity life over a quality life are far reaching and potentially disastrous: a world dependent on fossil fuels is heating up beyond our ability to repair it. Factory farms are producing cheap animals to eat at the expense of the environment and our own human ability to fight infections. The massive infusion of cheap corn into our diet and into our marketplace has led to an epidemic of health issues like diabetes...in our heads, we can count the cost of a life abundant in quantity...but mostly we look the other way.

But if we could turn our attention to the value of living a life abundant in quality, now that would really be something!

There are powerful ways to look at embracing quality over quantity, and they're all around us: the movement to embrace locally grown produce and products, the movement to reduce our waste of fresh water, the movement to reduce or eliminate our use of factory farmed animals for food. The movement to embrace quality-made items that are produced on a smaller scale, the movement to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels for transportation, heating, and industry. The slow food movement in direct opposition to the fast food industry.

I see all of these as being consistent with our faith efforts to embrace abundant life in a quality over quantity way.

The days immediately following the resurrection were so much simpler than they are today. And yet, we still have a choice when it comes to living our lives in accordance to our faith, or in spite of our faith.

Of course, we could get overwhelmed if we listed every choice we make every day that comes down to quantity over quality, we'd probably just want to not think about it anymore. But we must!

Jesus offers us a gift of the life abundant, and if we don't know the difference between quantity and quality, we may not be ready to make the right choices.

The world has slowly evolved into a massive marketplace where almost anybody can buy almost anything, any time, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Most of us have access to more than we need most days. With so much sitting there for the taking, how do we not indulge? What motivation do we have to exercise moderation? Why would we delay our satisfaction for even a few minutes?

When I read the passage from Acts, I imagined what a faith community might look like that spent its time gathering for worship, and sharing its resources, and eating with glad and generous hearts. That seems so much more appealing to me than the lonely isolation of living in the world where one can purchase and consume anything at just about any time.

Intentional reflection on our life choices, with special emphasis on the consequences of our actions, can bring into focus the kind of life Jesus invites us to live. His gift of life abundant is given to us unconditionally, with love and trust that we will live our lives according to our faith. But if

we rarely ever stop and evaluate how our faith lives are related to our life decisions, how will we ever make the right choices?

A growing number of Christians are waking up to the consequences of living a life based on quantity over quality. They are seeing the value in living with less quantity in order to experience more quality. They are starting to apply their faith values to the way they purchase food, cars, homes, and clothing.

The disciples may have found their new life approach to be a bit inconvenient. The modern world finds inconvenience to be absolutely intolerable.

How do we reconcile the difference between a life lived for quality over a life lived for quantity?

I believe that we would do well to reflect on our own lives, and see if there aren't a few small steps we could take that would bring our life choices more in line with what we profess to believe.

Perhaps making some intentional changes that in the short term might be a little inconvenient, but in the long term will have a positive impact on our environment, on our community, even on our souls.

Jesus came so that we might have life, and have it abundantly. It's up to us to figure out the difference between the abundant life of quantity and the abundant life of quality, and which one we want to live.

But I hope we choose well, because I get the sense that the very future of the church depends on us, and the choices we make.

Abundant life is right here in our very hands, all we have to do is accept it.

Amen.