



**The Party of Life
John 1:1-5, 10-14
January 3, 2021
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Many of you have probably taken down your Christmas decorations. I instructed the custodians to leave up our Christmas decorations, because in the church Christmas lasts 12 days. Today is day 10.

Our scripture passage this morning is from the first chapter of the Gospel of John. This is John's version of the Christmas story. It is completely different from Matthew's version or Luke's version. It doesn't contain shepherds or angels or magi or a star or even a baby. This Christmas story begins at the very beginning...at the beginning of time.

Why is John's Gospel story so different? It is said that Matthew and Luke's versions are from an earthly perspective. John's version is from a heavenly perspective.

As we read John's version of the Christmas story, we are going to learn about life. Life was interesting in 2020. I remember when 2020 first started, I heard people say such things as "2020 - a year of perfect vision."
"2020 – isn't that a lovely sounding year?"

It was anything but, wasn't it?

As we prepare to take a look at life from the heavenly perspective in John, maybe it will help us with the year 2020. Before I read, let us pray.

Stir in us now, Holy Spirit, a willingness to hear, the desire to know the truth and the courage to follow in joyful obedience, that we may be formed by your word into women and men of faith. Amen

Read John 1: 1-5, 10-14

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was with God in the beginning. ³ Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ⁴ In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. ¹¹ He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. ¹² Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— ¹³ children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

¹⁴ The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

The Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

It would be easy to put on a Christmas pageant based on John's gospel. All you need is a candle and a way to light it. In fact, we sort of did that in our Christmas Eve worship service. It started with a single light coming down the aisle as Pastor Craig carried the lit Christ Candle.

"The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it."

From that candle, we lit the rest of the candles, the lights in the sanctuary went up representing the light from the Christ candle pushing back the darkness.

I think we understand that light better this year. We have dialed down the holiday merriment, the parties, the get-togethers. And as a result, we value that single glowing candle.

"In him was life, and that life was the light of all people."

That life, our scripture passage says, began at the very beginning, bringing all things into existence. In other words, before there was anything else but God, there was life. In the beginning was the Word, that is, Christ...and in Him was life.

And this life was given to us. At the beginning, God breathed life into human beings. Nothing exists without that breath of God. Whenever I pray, I thank God for the gift of life that has been God-breathed into us. So, what do we do with this life that has been breathed into us?

I came across this definition of life from Wikipedia: "Life is a characteristic of self-organizing, self-recycling systems consisting of populations of replicators that are capable of mutation around most of which homeostatic metabolizing organisms evolved."

Okaay...

Now, if you understand that sentence, what would life be like if that was all we did? All we did was sit, have complex organization, metabolize, grow, respond to stimuli, reproduce, and adapt. I don't think there would be a whole lot of purpose to life. Death would have no meaning. Relationships would not last.

I think we all know that life is more than this kind of existence. Our existence is also mental, emotional, social, and spiritual. If nothing else, this pandemic has shown us how important relationships are. We are meant to be in relationships. We are meant to touch, hug, love. We are not meant just to live; we are meant to have life.

Listen to what Jesus said:

I came so you may have life and you have it abundantly. (John 10:10)

As a young Christian I wondered what Jesus meant by the abundant life. Was I supposed to be happy all the time? Was I supposed to have it all together as a Christian?

What is this abundant life?

The word Jesus used here to describe this kind of life means "superabundant." Kind of like a super hero. It is more than what is.

Jesus came to give us life so abundant that it is more than we could ever anticipate or expect—superabundantly. He promises us a life far better than we could ever envision. The Apostle Paul says is wonderfully later in the scriptures: “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love Him.” (I Corinthians 2:9)

Now, this superabundant life doesn't mean lavish homes, expensive cars, and more money than we will ever need. The reason is because riches were never a priority for Jesus. The superabundant life doesn't mean economic, or academic or social status. Most Christians do not come from privileged classes.

The biblical definition of life was given to us by Christ himself as he prayed to His Father: “Now, this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you sent. “ (John 17:3)

Note that this definition of life does not mention length of days, health, prosperity, family or occupation. It only mentions knowing God. Abundant life is simply knowing God. Having a relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

"I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die."(John 11:25-26)

This life that was there before the beginning of the world is offered to us; It is offered to us now abundantly and goes on forever...which is why we call it eternal life. It is a relationship with God through Christ that is now and goes on forever.

This relationship with God is so wonderful that our scripture passage says we become children of God. Now, that sounds pretty superabundant to me. Becoming a child of God.

As a result of this relationship as children of God, we live different lives, we love more, we give more, we walk in the blessings we receive from God and we share them. We have abundant life in Christ.

When we are searching for direction and guidance, Christ leads us.
When we are desperate for forgiveness and new life, Christ fills us.
When we are hungering for meaning and insight, Christ satisfies us.
When we are looking for holiness in the swirling chaos of current events, Jesus reveals himself to us.

Abundant life is not about what we have, not what we get, not what we claim.
Abundant life is what we receive from God.

The abundant life is taking what we have received and we abundantly share it with others.

So, here we are in this pandemic. What does abundant life look like in a pandemic? When we spend the holidays without family or friends? When we have to worry about every encounter? Every trip to the grocery store? We are even fearful to come and worship together? Is that the abundant life?

We come back to that one glowing candle, piercing the darkness. The carol that we sang earlier says, "light and life to all he brings, ris'n with healing in his wings."

I think we can all say that we look at life differently now. Even the little things that didn't mean much before, are now abundant life. Some of you may feel you are not living the abundant life as you stay in your homes. But look for it in the small things. It is there. Here is how I experienced abundant life in small things during this pandemic:

A Christmas tree Advent calendar was sent to me by some friends. I talked about it in one of my email blasts. Each day in December I opened a door in this calendar and received a Christmas tree ornament and a devotional that told me how much I am loved by God. This made for me an abundant Advent throughout all of December.

A meal was provided for me on Christmas Day by a church member. I hadn't had a meal like that for a long time. It reminded me of my mother's cooking. I felt rich in abundant life as I ate it.

I got to sit by the bedside of a church member who was dying, but she was having a good day. We ate lunch together. Her family joined us. And as I anointed her with oil, read scripture and prayed over her, together we all experienced the abundant life.

I went to visit another church member who was dying. As I walked into her room, I experienced the daughter singing to her Mom as she lay in a coma. It was a rich encounter in the abundant life.

When we as the staff were exposed to the virus, I went to Tucson to get tested. I focused on the nurse who explained every step, who seemed to really care even though she was doing this hundreds of times a day. I prayed for her and all her fellow workers and other caregivers. It was an abundant moment.

I held classes over Zoom. And as we studied scripture together and prayed together, and shared what God is doing in our lives together, we experienced the abundant life.

All the email blasts I have been sending (a couple a week) are what I am experiencing in the abundant life with Christ during this pandemic.

“For in him we live and move and have our being.” (Acts 17:28)

I offer you the abundant life in Christ. It is life from the beginning of time. It is the joy of knowing and serving God now. It is life everlasting that we look forward to. It is knowing God and being a child of God.

The abundant life is yours. Amen.

