

**Easter 4 Year C 2020**  
**May 3, 2020**  
**Sermon**

Alleluia! Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

This “abundant life” that Jesus speaks of in today’s gospel reading seems to be a bit of a challenge these days. I’m guessing that most of us would agree that due to the coronavirus, we’re not able to live our best life possible these days. Sure, there are some benefits—I don’t have to put on makeup every day, we get to sleep in, spend the day with our pets. But the constant concern that we or our loved ones may get sick, or we may cause someone else to get sick and die, makes living abundantly seem pretty difficult.

## THE WHOLENESS WHEEL



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But I think that even under normal circumstances, living abundantly can still be difficult. Portico, the ELCA’s health insurance and benefits company, has developed a tool called “The Wholeness Wheel” that is meant to help people live a balanced—and perhaps abundant life. In the center of the circle is the reminder that, “In Baptism [we are] new creations in Christ.” Then, the circle is divided into 6 different types of wellness: physical well-being, emotional well-being, social/interpersonal well-being, intellectual well-being, vocational well-being, and financial well-being. Then, in a ring around the circle, encompassing the entire image is a 7<sup>th</sup> type of wellness, which is our spiritual well-being.

It can be hard to keep all of these different types of wellness in check and in balance with one another. Maybe we are working an underpaying job, and so we are struggling with our financial wellness, or we don’t feel called to the work that we find ourselves doing—it is simply a way to spend our time. Perhaps there’s nothing in our lives to challenge us, and so we are starved to engage in intellectual activities. Perhaps in this time of isolation, we’ve struggled to remain connected with one another and our social well-being has been difficult to manage. Perhaps we’ve found ourselves with limited mobility, or we choose not to be active, and our physical health has suffered because of it. Sometimes we get the idea that we need to “do it all” or “have it all”, and as we put our noses to the grindstone, we neglect the need to rest, and care for our emotional wellness.

There’s a lot to pay attention to when we’re thinking about abundant living, and trying to satisfy all of these different areas of wellness can be exhausting—which is obviously, the exact opposite of what we want.

But this is what happens in our lives. We get caught up in activities or mindsets that are not life-giving, and that do not contribute to our wellness, and we are unable to live the abundant life that Christ has prepared for us. In our Gospel reading, these activities that appear to be shortcuts to happiness or wellness, are like the thieves and bandits that Jesus describes.

Abundant life in Christ involves all aspects of the Wholeness Wheel. It involves taking care of ourselves physically and emotionally, it means making good financial decisions, it means engaging in service to the community through whatever calling God has set before us, it means exercising our minds, and connecting with others. And it means trusting that God has created us anew, that God loves us and that God promises to provide for all of our needs.

This is the example that we see in our reading from Acts. The early Christians devoted themselves “to teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and the prayers”—in essence, they devoted themselves to worship. They took rest in Christ. And at the same time, they also worked toward the common good, providing for those in need, and caring for one another. And they had “glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of the people.” This is what it means to have abundant life. It means to take time for worship and rest, and to use our gifts and talents to help those in need in our community and throughout the world.

This is what Jesus is talking about in today’s Gospel reading as he promises that we will have abundant life. Now, there are two different metaphors, or comparisons, in our passage for today, and it’s easy for them to run together. The first metaphor is in verses 1-6, in which it seems Jesus is speaking about himself as the shepherd. The second part of our gospel reading, verses 7-10, are not necessarily an explanation of what we’ve just heard. I think that Jesus has moved on to a second metaphor in this portion. Here, Jesus declares, “I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture.” And I think this second metaphor, of Jesus as the gate, has a lot to do with wholeness.

What we hear today is that we don’t have to be constantly working to find wholeness in our lives. It’s not something that we have to be tirelessly searching for, or running ourselves ragged to find. Instead, Jesus promises to be the gate that will open the way for us to abundant life. Jesus is the gate that opens for us so that we might come in and find rest, and Jesus is the gate that opens the way to send us out into the pasture.

When Jesus leads us in to find rest, we can trust that we are safe and secure, that God is watching over us, and that nothing can separate us from the love of God. We can trust that God will be in control, and that God has provided this time of rest and worship so that we can be refreshed, restored, and made whole again.

Then, when the time comes, after we have taken our rest, and devoted ourselves to worship, we are then sent back out into the pasture—back out into the world—to participate in God’s work of loving and serving all of creation.

Christ reminds us that we don’t have to “have it all” or “do it all” or be “all things to all people.” Just as we know that it is important to engage in service within our community, and care for one another, it is equally important that we take time to worship and to rest.

This is abundant life—taking time for rest, and worship and service, and trusting that Christ will be our guide. Because Jesus is the gate, and God is in control, we are called to follow as sheep of God’s fold. Jesus the gate will lead us in for rest and send us out for service. Through Christ our guide, we shall all have abundant life. Thanks be to God. Amen.