

Growing in Abundance: Finding the Source of Our Abundance
May 12, 2024

Scripture—John 10:10-15

The thief enters only to steal, kill, and destroy. I came so that they could have life—indeed, so that they could live life to the fullest.

¹¹“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹²When the hired hand sees the wolf coming, he leaves the sheep and runs away. That’s because he isn’t the shepherd; the sheep aren’t really his. So the wolf attacks the sheep and scatters them. ¹³He’s only a hired hand and the sheep don’t matter to him.

¹⁴“I am the good shepherd. I know my own sheep and they know me, ¹⁵just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. I give up my life for the sheep.

God bless the reading, the hearing, and the understanding of the Scripture...

Thanks be to God.

The Message:

“I came so that they could have life—indeed, so they could live life to the fullest.” (CEB) Or, as some translations put it, “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.” (NRSV). To have abundantly means to have a surplus, in this case of life. It is about living our lives of super abundance. To be a follower of Jesus, to know who he is, and what he means, is to have a superabundant life. But all too often we feel like we are living in a drought, and it sucks all our energy, energy that might otherwise nourish our soul to live fully who God calls us to be as individuals and as a church.

There is a folklore of ancient times that tells of a Roman soldier who approached Julius Caesar requesting permission to end his life by suicide. He was already known as a wretched, miserable, dispirited man, with little to no vitality. Upon hearing the man’s request, Caesar looked at the soldier incredulously and asked, “Were you ever really alive?” When we try living our lives solely by our own power, it can feel like the world is hopeless and cruel. But when we graft ourselves to a greater power than ourselves, we discover the source of our abundance, the hope of new life sprouts within us, and seems to flow naturally. It is that hope that enables us to better fulfill our mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

Today’s reading, we discover we already have a source for abundance, the problem is that we as human beings seem to have this tendency to block or deflect abundance from flowing through our lives. It is like we allow the metaphorical thieves and robbers to penetrate our minds, sabotaging our attempts at living our lives

abundantly. Whether intentional or not, we listen to the critical words and innuendos, that can sap the life out of our true self.

We hear things like, “You’ll never amount to anything... why bother trying? You always fail... You have to be more realistic... Keep in mind you are not as talented as Sally... You’re too old or too young to make a difference ... You’re just dreaming, get your head out of the clouds.” Although these words may be well intended to protect us from being hurt or disappointed, they undermine our confidence, self-esteem and belief in our ability to tap into the source of our abundance that empowers us to rise above a scarcity mentality. We forget we already have access to abundance through Jesus Christ.

In contrast to the thief who takes, as it refers to in the scripture, Jesus gives. The life he gives in the here and now is abundantly richer and fuller. Life in him is lived on a higher plain because of his position as our shepherd. And he’s not just any kind of shepherd, he’s the Good Shepherd.

When his disciples first heard him claim this label for himself, they most certainly detected the resonance these words had with Psalm 23. It is the best known and perhaps the most beloved of the Psalms. In fact, I wager that many of us know some version of Psalm 23. And whatever translation we are familiar with, I’d wager they all start with the same five words, “The Lord is my shepherd.” (Psalm 23:1a) In the ancient world, kings were known as shepherds of their people. So, to profess the “Lord is my shepherd,” is to declare loyalty to God with the intention of living under God's direction.

Yes, “The Lord is my shepherd.” But that is only the first half of the first verse of that Psalm. Traditionally it goes on to say, “I shall not want.” (Psalm 23:1) or at least those are the words as I learned them. “The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want.” I shall not want? What does that even mean? Does that mean if I declare loyalty to God, I will have everything I want? If I stay true to God, will I be able to do strict pull ups at the gym? If I obediently follow God, will I become a bestselling author? What does the psalmist mean by, “I shall not want.”

Interestingly enough the more updated translations of the Bible, including the New International Version, which was redacted in 2012 changed those four words from, “I shall not want,” to, “I lack nothing.” Even the original translation from Hebrew to Spanish in the *Nueva Version Internacional*, which is the Spanish equivalent of NIV, reads and always has read, “*El Señor es mi pastor, nada me falta,*” which could be further translated into English as “The Lord is my shepherd, I’m missing or lacking nothing.” If you worshiped with me last week, you know that I don’t claim to know everything, biblically speaking or otherwise, and neither do the biblical scholars. The more they learn about the scripture and the culture from which it was created, the more they tweak the language. This is why most newer translations and some edited versions of old, now read, “The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.”

These words are more congruent with the words found in Deuteronomy, written to what was then a new generation of Israelites, entering the promised land. It says in chapter 2:7, “surely the Lord your God has blessed you in all your undertakings; he knows you're going through this great wilderness. These forty years the Lord your God has been with you; You have lacked nothing.” And of course, Psalm 23 reinforces that understanding as the remaining five verses detail how God keeps the Psalmist alive; providing water, food, shelter, helping them avoid danger. Over and over, it recounts how God's powerful presence provides for their lives abundantly.

Now this doesn't mean they got “the fish...the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions and the garlic,” (Numbers 11:5) they remembered feasting on when they were in Egypt. In fact, if you were to read the broader story found in chapter 11 of the book of Numbers, you would see that despite their freedom, they remained captive to scarcity thinking. That is, they focused on what they didn't have, the “comforts” of Egypt, rather than what they *did* have, freedom and the hope of the promised land. They succumbed to a scarcity mentality, as they developed their own version of a critical voice of hopelessness within them.

Whether the critical voice is from people who are with you in real time, voices from the past deeply imprinted on your mind, or newly developed circumstances of discomfort, they create in you a blight, stunting you from growing into abundance. You start to lose energy, because all your energy is going into assessing what you lack, rather than seeing that you have been grafted to a source of abundance through Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the good shepherd. A good shepherd, is a real shepherd, born into the task. A good shepherd lays his life down for the sheep. A good shepherd makes a commitment. He has a relationship with the sheep; the shepherd knows the sheep and the sheep knows the shepherd. (John 10:14) We see in today's reading the relationship is between the shepherd and the sheep which is, of course, metaphorically speaking of the relationship between Jesus and the people. But it goes on to say in verse 15, “just as the Father knows me and I know the Father.”

The relationship is not only between Jesus and the people, but also the relationship between Jesus and God. And it is Jesus who further joins *us* into relationship with God. The Apostle Paul writes as much in his letter to the Romans, saying, “If a root is holy, the branches will be holy too. If some of the branches were broken off, and you were a wild olive branch, and you were grafted in among the other branches and shared the root that produces the rich oil of the olive tree, then don't brag like you're better than the other branches. If you do brag, be careful: it's not you that sustains the root, but it's the root that sustains you.” (Romans 11:16b-18)

While this scripture highlights our being grafted into the abundant power of God, it also highlights something else that can get in the way of us actually living life in its full abundance. When we become what some might call arrogant, believing we are

fully self-sufficient, we in many ways, block ourselves from truly living a life of abundance.

We become close-minded with the belief that we already know everything and believe only our way is the right way. We close our mind to new ideas, perspectives and opportunities for growth. When we think we have it all figured out we neglect to collaborate with others effectively. Collaboration and teamwork are essential for achieving abundance as they allow for the pooling of resources, skills and ideas. Our growth can be stunted, because we are blind to opportunities of growth and abundance as we believe we've already reached the pinnacle of success; we stop striving for improvement. The truth is growth and development are a continuous process necessary for abundance in all aspects of life.

When we are grafted to the source of our abundance, God our Creator, through Jesus Christ, we are nourished with a healthy dose of humility, openness and willingness to learn and collaborate with others. These essential nutrients help us overcome the barriers that prohibit us from cultivating abundance not only in our lives but the lives of others. When we soak in these nutrients we flourish as individuals, but we also flourish as a church.

So now that we have found the source of our abundance, how do we tap into it? We need to let go of the things that hold us back from fully growing into God's power of abundance. One way I do that for myself is that I keep what I call a God box. When there is something that saps my energy, I write it down on a piece of paper fold it and put it in my God box and trust God to take care of it, so I don't have to worry about it. I have recorded worries I had that kept my focus away from where it needed to move forward, self-doubts, times I've missed the mark by sins of commission or sins of omission, I've recorded people and circumstances that seem to be working against the vision I believe God has called me to.

I write these down as they come to me, each on its own slip of paper and I put it in my God box, for God to deal with. I give it to God. This quiets the scarcity chatter in my mind so I can better discern what I can do, rather than dwelling on that which I have no control over. So, today I encourage you to start your own God box, so you can better tap into the abundant life Jesus promise each and every one of us.

Let us pray...

Next Steps

- I will ponder/memorize/meditate on, Psalm 23:1 The Lord is my Shepherd I lack nothing.
- I will let go of _____ so I can grow into God's abundant power.
- I will recommend RUMC to someone. Worship services are:
____Live 9:00am at 833 3rd Street, Reedsburg

_____ YouTube Sunday afternoon

_____ Reedsburg TV Station 11.1 Tuesday at 3:00

- I will read/meditate on Acts 2:42-47 in preparation for next Sunday's worship.
- I will continue to support RUMC through my prayers, presence, gifts, services, and witness.
- I will attend the next sermon series Growing Into Abundance.
- I will pray the breakthrough prayer at 8:33 am & 8:33 pm:

All loving God it is by your grace we thrive.

Continue guiding us in using your Spirit
to boldly move us in fulfilling your purposes.
We name it! We claim it, in Jesus' name. Amen