

Streetsville United Church
Sunday, April 13, 2008
Rev. John Tapscott

“ABUNDANT LIVING”

John 10:10b

What did Jesus mean when he said “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly?” (John 10:10b) Was he speaking of having an abundance of money and material things? Some Christians say, “Yes, God wants his people to prosper. He will fill your life with material blessings, if you follow certain Biblical principles.”

Now our God is an abundant God, whose Son multiplied loaves and fishes to feed thousands. God has created a world with plenty for everyone’s need, if not everyone’s greed. Grinding poverty brings God no honour or joy. Now one Psalmist says that he has never seen a righteous man begging for bread, and perhaps so, but I don’t see a direct link between piety and material abundance. I see faithful Christians doing well and I see people who never think of God doing well, too. One of the wealthiest men in the community where I grew up turned his back on God and walked out of church for good one Sunday fifty years ago when the minister appealed for funds. Yet this man’s wealth has just kept growing and growing. Now God will likely have a word with him on the last day, to the effect that those to whom much is given, much is required. Indeed, this fellow might be a bit uncomfortable as he stands before God on judgement day and gives an account of himself.

On the other hand I have seen faithful Christians struggle financially, just as non-believers sometimes do. There seems to be no direct connection between faith and material abundance. Jesus said “God makes the sun shine and the rain fall on both the just and the unjust.” He told us that when that when we “seek first God’s Kingdom and his righteousness”, the things we need will be added unto us, enough, to be sure, but not necessarily an overflowing abundance. Jesus also said, “A person’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.” So when you put it all together, it’s clear that what Jesus means by having life and having it abundantly is not just an overflow of money and things. These things are not evil in themselves, but they are not what abundant life is all about. Jesus came so that we may have life indeed, as the Bible puts it, the real thing. “The thief comes only to steal and destroy: I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.”

So what is this abundant life like that Jesus came to bring? If we really receive it, how would it be expressed in our lives?

First, it would mean living with a great sense of purpose.

So many people have much to live with but nothing to live for. Why are we here? What is life's purpose? The thieves and robbers of our time say that the purpose and aim of life is to gain ease, comfort, material abundance. But that's not a big enough purpose to satisfy our souls. Without a bigger purpose than that we are constantly dissatisfied and discontented.

Jesus came to give our lives a big purpose. "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness." Now the Kingdom of God is the reign of God upon the whole earth and in every human heart. Ultimately God will bring it about in his own time and own way. But until the final renewal of all things, God has given us a role to play in extending his reign upon the earth. God makes believers his servants, whose big purpose is to work with God in bringing about his justice and righteousness. To wake up each morning and say, "What small thing can I do today for God's Kingdom? What can I do today for Jesus and to help his church move forward?" and then to do it, is a purpose which satisfies the human heart. This purpose gives our lives direction and meaning. And it begins as we allow Christ to reign in our own hearts and we grow in the fruits of the Holy Spirit - love, joy and peace, patience, kindness, faithfulness, goodness, gentleness and self-control. Jesus said, "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly." Living abundantly means living with a great purpose.

Secondly, abundant living means living with a sense of power.

Now the ironic thing about living with a sense of power is that you must first recognize your own lack of power. In Revelation chapter 3 the risen Christ says to the church at Philadelphia, "I know that you have but little power." When we recognize that we can't live the Christian life or meet life's challenges on our own power, we then open a door for Christ's power to flow into our lives. And Christ's power makes us triumphantly adequate for whatever life brings us. So Paul writes, "I can do all things through him who strengthens me." And further, "God's power is made perfect in weakness, for when I am weak then I am strong." That is abundant living.

Anyone who drives into Streetsville from the west or the south will some day get stopped at the tracks by a slow-moving freight train. The other day I was stopped and as I watched the powerful locomotive engines working hard, I thought of a photo story I once saw in National Geographic magazine. It was about the prairies in Western Canada and included a section about the trains which haul grain from prairie elevators up and over the Rockies and then down into the west coast ports. Apparently the power of the locomotives is sometimes inadequate to pull the heavy load up the steepest part of the mountain passes, especially if one of the four or five or six locomotives is not working at peak efficiency. And when this happens the locomotives actually stall out before the train reaches the peak of some steep

grade. The train just grinds to a halt in a cloud of black smoke. So what to do? Well, the engines are given a couple of hours to cool down, then one or two locomotives come in from the west and join the stalled train. All the engines are fired up again and with the extra power, the train starts slowly moving up the hill and eventually reaches the top, before starting its descent to Vancouver.

Many people are carrying heavy loads and burdens and if they try to do it on human power alone, they will eventually stall or crash. That is not abundant living. But living abundantly comes from relying on a source of power from beyond ourselves. And that source of power is Christ himself. When you ask for his help, he comes and joins his strength with yours so that you can carry your burdens and meet the challenges and make it triumphantly to the top. Jesus said, "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly."

Living abundantly also means living with less anxiety.

You cannot live abundantly if you're tied up in knots of fear and worry. Your life becomes cramped, and you often find it hard to make decisions and move forward.

I confess that I have fallen into the sin of anxiety. I have had sleepless nights worrying about tomorrow and about things I really can't control. Now there is a good kind of anxiety which gets you moving. But anxiety is sin when you fail to share your anxieties with God. Jesus doesn't want us to be unnecessarily anxious. He told his followers, "Do not be anxious about your life." The key to living less anxiously and more abundantly is to share your worries with God, as Jesus himself did. Jesus said, "I am the door," the door through whom we come to our Heavenly Father in prayer. Paul writes, "Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication, let your requests be known to God." The reason I fall into sinful anxiety is because I don't always follow this Biblical instruction. But here's what happens when we do. Paul says that "the peace of God which passes all understanding will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." And it works. When I finally hand over to God the things and the people I'm worried about, peace comes, a peace that can only be described as the peace of Christ. The situation doesn't always change, at least not right away, but now you are sharing it with someone greater than yourself. The abundant life Jesus came to bring surely means living with less anxiety and more peace. Jesus said, "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly."

Finally, living abundantly means living with a sense of eternal security.

Now people need a sense of earthly security. We need to plan wisely for our families, our financial futures, our retirement. Nothing wrong with that at all, at long as our quest for earthly security doesn't become a 24/7 365 day a year obsession.

Yet many people have no sense of final security, no sense of being held in the everlasting arms of God, in life, in death or in life beyond death. And there is no abundant living without that. We need to know that will stand before God on the last day and not be rejected, but forgiven and accepted and welcomed into the Father's house. And it is Christ who by his life, death and resurrection, gives us that security. We only have to trust in Him to receive it.

Rev. Dr. David Read, a Presbyterian minister in New York was a chaplain with the British Army in World War Two. Once he was trapped with a thousand troops in a French village. The street was on fire at both ends. They would either die or be captured by the enemy, which eventually happened. But on that street David Read discovered that he believed absolutely in the presence and power of God whose love would not him go, no matter what. Why was he so sure? David Read writes, "In a word, Christ. It was Christ who was with us on that burning street just as he himself had passed through the fire of suffering and death to his resurrection life." To have this sense of final security is to live abundantly. And Christ gives this gift to all who turn to him in faith and gratitude.

In the famous painting of Jesus standing at the door knocking, did you ever notice that there is no latch on the outside of the door? The door can only be opened from the inside. Each of us has a door to our hearts and in order to receive his gift, we must open the door for Christ to come in, perhaps for the first time, or to come in again, if we've been keeping him at arms length. For to have Christ is to have abundant life. So let's open the door to Christ today, you and I. Let's not miss the gift He came to bring. "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly."

