

I have come so you may have life and have it abundantly.

So ends our gospel reading on this 4th Sunday in Easter and we are given our clearest statement of Jesus' mission to all creation

It is reason he walked among us: granting life to those around him by Healing diseases.....mending broken relationships.....counting no one out but inviting all to his table...

He granted life by the grace of forgiveness and by the pragmatism of bread and fish for the hungry....he pressed aside customs and habits, even long standing religious teachings so that life could be lived to its fullest by those being oppressed.

These are the stories we tell again and again and they all lead to this:

I have come so you may have life....and have it abundantly.

What is this 'abundant' life?

The psalmist gives us one view of this gift of life under the care and protection of the Good Shepherd –

Where we are safe to lie down in pastures that are green. We are able to put aside our terror at the enemies all around us. It is life lived in trust, security and hope....confident in the shepherd and the future that the Shepherd makes possible.

But I think that abundant life is even a step further to a life lived in awareness of the presence of the Divine among us, experiencing God near us – inviting us into moments when the veil falls between this life and the life beyond.

AT these moments, when God draws near, we are filled - With hope, with strength with joy, with contentment.

We are not seeking something different, we want nothing more than what lies before us in this moment. We have a taste of perfection in the midst of this world's imperfection and we are satisfied to rest in that peace for a while.

These are moments when we look around us - and what was ugly or broken or flawed fades away, to become a part of the perfection through the Spirit's power. When it all seems to be exactly the way God planned it.

It's the man who was born blind that gets Jesus talking about abundant life. Remember the story? He was born blind and after Jesus healed him, no one would acknowledge the power that was obviously among them. He's dumbfounded at their blindness – and stubbornness too I thinkand bursts out to his interlockers 'Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes.

Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. **If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.'**

NEVER!

Not only have the scales which kept that man's eyes from seeing fallen awayThe scales have fallen away and he can see GOD in Jesus. Before his eyes is the Good Shepherd and the offer of an abundant life.

You have had these moments too – I'm sure. Perhaps they are just fleeting, but they cause you to stop and breathe in, pausing to experience the experience: to take it all in. I'll tell you a few of mine and then I'm going to ask you to tell each other one or two of yours.

I was driving on the Massachusetts turnpike on a bright blue autumn day when the foliage was at peak. It was so beautiful I had to stop to breathe it in

Then there was Vermeer's painting The Girl with the Pearl Earring. I was drawn in, as if I knew this 17th century girl, as if she was waiting to speak to me.

Here's another. Nuzzling the necks of my children when they were just infants. The wonder of them, the softness of their skin, and a sense of life flowing from me to each one of them.

Let's take a moment and think about those times in our lives when we have experienced the abundance of life of which Jesus speaks. What does it look like for you? What does it taste like or feel like? *****

Easter invites us into life abundant – where we can feel God's presence and see God's hand. We feel the perfection of the moment, we are at peace and overwhelmed by this gift of life we've been offered.

Rejoice and be glad my friends for the risen Jesus is leading us, calling us, walking with us into life abundant –

Alleluia. Amen.