



April 22, 2018

In Jesus, We Find All the Life We Need

Pastor Vern Christopherson

JOHN 1:14-18; 3:16-17; 10:7-11; 21:10-12; 20:30-31 NRSV

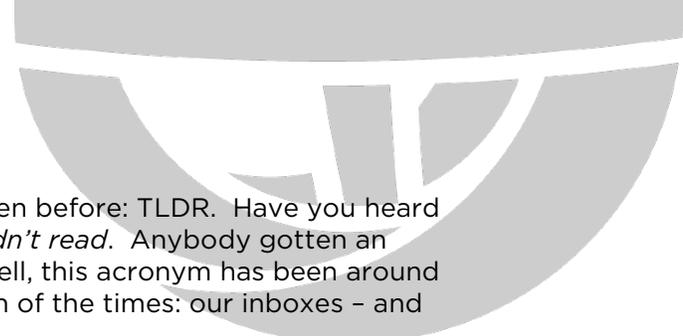
¹⁴And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. ¹⁵(John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.' ") ¹⁶From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

¹⁶For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. ¹⁷Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

⁷So again Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. ¹⁰The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. ¹¹I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

¹⁰Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." ¹¹So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn. ¹²Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, "Who are you?" because they knew it was the Lord.

³⁰Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. ³¹But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.



I came across an acronym this past week that I hadn't seen before: TLDR. Have you heard of it? It has to do with emails. It stands for: *Too long, didn't read*. Anybody gotten an email lately that felt too long to read? From what I can tell, this acronym has been around for a while, but it's showing up more and more. It's a sign of the times: our inboxes – and our brains – are filled to overflowing.

I can imagine long-email senders getting their feelings hurt when an email gets returned with TLDR stamped across the top. It has a dismissive tone to it: *Too long, didn't read*. On the positive side, however, some senders are now anticipating this response, and they're putting the acronym at the top of their own emails. They're also including a handy summary of the content. It's as if to say, "If you don't have time to read the whole thing, at least read the summary, please."

Now, I can guess what some of you might be thinking: "Pastor Vern, why don't we try this with sermons – just give us the summary? We could change the acronym to TLDL: *Too long, didn't listen*." Am I right about this? *Don't answer that question. I don't want to know*. But the fact of the matter is, our lives are often so full that we're not sure if we can cram in one more thing.

We're coming to the end of our reading of the Gospel of John. Ironically, one of the main themes of John is abundance. *The Word became flesh and lived among us...full of grace and truth. From his fullness, we have all received grace upon grace*. John is talking about Jesus, of course, and the incarnation, and how Jesus has come to make our lives rich and full. Jesus says to us: "I come that you may have life and have it abundantly." Now, I'm pretty sure the abundance Jesus is offering has very little to do with long emails. So what is he offering us? And is it something we have time for in our busy, face-paced world?

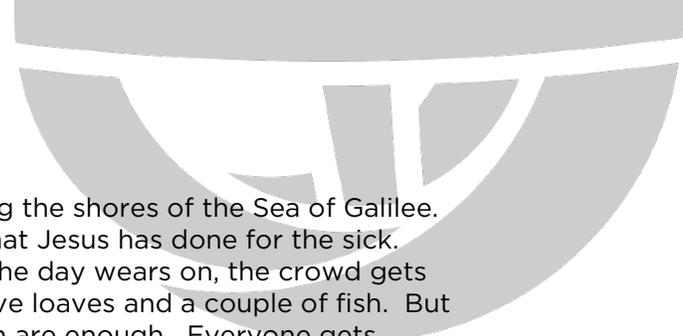
As we start out in John, we hear Jesus' invitation to "come and see." For folks like Philip and Andrew, Jesus comes walking their way. He invites them to stop what they're doing, and come and see the life he's offering, a life unlike any other. Jesus hints that *in him, they will find all the life they need*.

We get a first-hand look of Jesus abundance at the wedding in Cana of Galilee. The unthinkable happens. The wine runs out. But in no time at all, Jesus turns water into wine and the jars are filled back up to the brim. Like a lot of things in John, more is going on than meets the eye. In fact, John calls this a sign, and he says it points beyond itself to the one who performed the miracle.

Jesus ends up doing seven signs throughout the gospel. He's the new rabbi on the scene. He'll encounter any number of people, and evoke a variety of responses. A Jewish leader named Nicodemus comes to him after dark. He's looking for answers that he can't find in his regular religious circles, but he's hesitant. What will the others think? A Samaritan woman gets into a conversation with Jesus beside a well. It turns out she has a deep thirst for acceptance and love. She desperately wants the living water Jesus is offering.

Right in the middle of these two stories comes John 3:16, which is the heart of John's gospel: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." What John is saying, I think, is that, in Jesus, seekers like Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman find a life that's not available anywhere else. They find things like forgiveness and acceptance and hope, and they find it in abundance. To put it another way: *in Jesus, they find all the life they need*.





Shortly after this, Jesus meets up with 5000 people along the shores of the Sea of Galilee. The crowds are getting bigger. They've seen signs of what Jesus has done for the sick. Now they're wondering what he might do for them. As the day wears on, the crowd gets hungry. The disciples are only able to scrape together five loaves and a couple of fish. But here's what's amazing: in Jesus' hands, the bread and fish are enough. Everyone gets plenty, and there are leftovers besides.

A few days later, the crowd is still buzzing about the meal. That's when Jesus says to them: "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry again." Like a lot of what Jesus says, they are left scratching their heads. This sounds like grace upon grace. It sounds like abundance. And yet it's about so much more than what's inside a person's cupboards. Over and over Jesus tells people that the life they really need starts with him.

What's perplexing to me - and sad too - is what happens after the feeding of the 5000. Much like Nicodemus, a number of people have doubts about Jesus. They start to pull away. In their minds, the bread was good, but Jesus seems to be asking for more than they can give. Another acronym applies: THDF: *Too hard, didn't follow*.

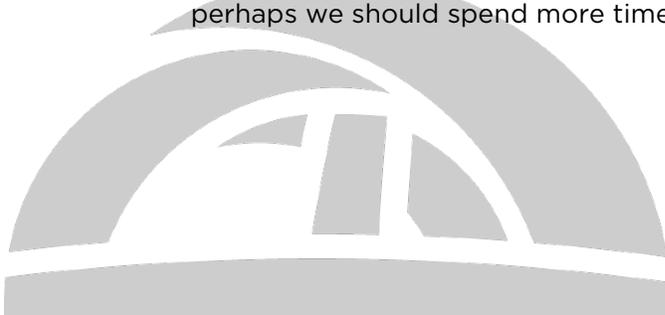
Later that evening, Jesus turns to his disciples: "Are you going to leave too?" They get very quiet. Finally Peter speaks for the group, "Lord, where else would we go? You have the words of eternal life." While this isn't exactly a ringing endorsement, it's the best they can do for now. They're reminded that following Jesus comes with a cost.

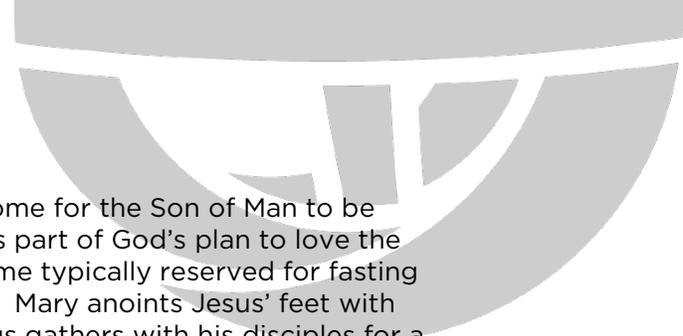
That cost is especially evident in the story of the man born blind. Jesus heals the man and he's able to see for the very first time. It should be the greatest day of his life. What he soon discovers, though, is all the conflict swirling around the healer himself. The man's neighbors squabble over whether or not it was really him that was healed. The religious leaders are furious because it happened on the Sabbath. The man's parents effectively disown him. Before the episode is over, the man gets expelled from the synagogue. And he's all alone.

It turns out that standing up for Jesus can be the hardest thing in the world, not only in Jesus' day, but 50 or 60 years later when the gospel was written and followers of Jesus were getting kicked out of the synagogue. Still, the man born blind stands up for Jesus anyway. He somehow finds the courage. You know where he finds it, don't you? The Good Shepherd has gone in search of one little lost sheep. *In Jesus, the man finds all the life he needs.*

Just a reminder: We read the story of the man born blind, a story of remarkable courage during the toughest of times, on February 11. It was three days before Ash Wednesday, three days before the tragic shootings at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School. One of the enduring images from that day was a mom with the sign of the cross on her forehead. Perhaps you saw it. She was marked in ashes, tears flowing, her arm around another mom. Both of them were waiting anxiously for news of their children.

The cross on the woman's forehead was a stark reminder of where John's story is heading, and of the Good Friday world in which we live. Lent is normally a solemn time, but this year - after Parkland - it seemed even more so. In a Good Friday world, we struggle to protect our children. We put them through active shooter drills. We shrug and say there's really nothing more we can do. And maybe that's true, but before we say such things, perhaps we should spend more time in prayer and repentance.





In the journey through Lent, we hear that the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. This has an ominous tone to it, but really, this is part of God's plan to love the world and to give God's only Son. Even during Lent, a time typically reserved for fasting and self-control, John gives us more signs of abundance. Mary anoints Jesus' feet with costly perfume and then dries his feet with her hair. Jesus gathers with his disciples for a last supper, washing their feet and telling them there's nothing more important than to love each other. As Mary the mother of Jesus stands at the foot of the cross, Jesus tells the Beloved Disciple to take her home and look after her. And then, as Jesus breathes his last, the world grows very still. It's as if true love has died and all hope is gone.

Who could have imagined that three days later love would come back to life? The tomb is empty. One by one, Jesus comes and finds his heartbroken, doubting, wayward disciples. He calls them by name - Mary Magdalene, Thomas, Peter - and an Easter faith comes to life.

Whatever else the resurrection is, Jesus' body bears the marks of his suffering, but also of his glory. Easter is filled with life and hope and abundance. It's symbolized by a net full of fish, one hundred and fifty-three of them. It's grace upon grace, grace beyond our wildest imagination. It comes with the rock-solid assurance that *in Jesus, we have all the life we need.*

I think we need the truth and certainty of the resurrection now more than ever. Kathy Khang recently wrote in Sojourners magazine: "It's hard to live as an Easter people when we're so often reminded that we live in a Good Friday world." In a world like ours, we look for signs of hope. In the picture of the moms from Parkland, the one marked with the cross was also wearing a silver locket. It was in the shape of a heart. Both symbols, the cross and the heart, are about love. And they're about a God who so loved the world that he gave his only Son.

I think one of the reasons John was written is because it has always been hard to be an Easter people. Whether we're in danger of being expelled from the synagogue, or losing a child at school, or facing some other unspeakable tragedy, we need a sure and certain hope this day. John tells us the purpose of his gospel: "These [stories] are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name." John probably could have added: "If you don't have time to read the whole thing, at least read the summary, please."

It can be hard to live as an Easter people in a Good Friday world. It can be painfully hard, but not impossible. Like the wedding at Cana when the wine runs out, when hope is gone, when you're not sure where you are going, when you think there is no future, when you doubt that grace is true, when you question if you can ever love again, the Good Shepherd goes in search of one little lost sheep, and that sheep might just be you.

This is the gospel story we need. Desperately. All of us. That we will, indeed, experience the truth of the resurrection beyond the empty tomb. That Jesus will show up on the shore, will invite us to share a meal once again, because abundance really means abundance when it comes to God. Why? Because it seems that God truly does love the world. Amen.

