

Wesley Celebration

August 2, 2009

Abundant Life

I would like to share a story I read on the internet this week. It's about a young boy in 1880 going to the circus for the first time. A little boy who lived far out in the country in the late 1800s had reached the age of twelve and had never in all his life seen a circus. You can imagine his excitement, when one day a poster went up at school announcing that on the next Saturday a traveling circus was coming to the nearby town. He ran home with the glad news and the question, "Daddy, can I go?" Although the family was poor, the father sensed how important this was to the lad. "If you do your Saturday chores ahead of time," he said, "I'll see to it that you have the money to go."

Come Saturday morning, the chores were done and the little boy stood by the breakfast table, dressed in his Sunday best. His father reached down into the pocket of his overalls and pulled out a dollar bill—the most money the little boy had possessed at one time in all his life. The father cautioned him to be careful and then sent him on his way to town.

The boy was so excited; his feet hardly seemed to touch the ground all the way. As he neared the outskirts of the village, he noticed people lining the streets, and he worked his way through the crowd until he could see what was happening. Lo and behold, it was the approaching spectacle of a circus parade! The parade was the grandest thing this lad had ever seen. Caged animals snarled as they passed, bands beat their rhythms and sounded shining horns, midgets performed acrobatics while flags and ribbons swirled overhead. Finally, after everything had passed where he was standing, the traditional circus clown, with floppy shoes, baggy pants, and a brightly painted face, brought up the rear. As the clown passed by, the little boy reached into his pocket and took out that precious dollar bill. Handing the money to the clown, the boy turned around and went home. What had happened? The boy thought he had seen the circus when he had only seen the parade!

How many of us are like that boy and have thought this is it, there isn't any more for me to see, to be, to experience? I equate this sort of view like the one from that movie with Jack Nicholson and Helen Hunt, "As Good as it Gets". There is a line I love in that movie that Jack Nicholson says while the 3 main characters are traveling to see if the token gay guy can get some money from his parents to help him out after being beaten. The other two characters played by Helen Hunt and Greg Kinnear are sharing some really intimate stories which tend to be on the sadder side and suddenly Jack Nicholson's character leans in from the back seat and says, "What if this is as good as it gets?", but the other two characters that are more optimistic quickly dismiss him, and move on to thinking positive about the situation. Which character do you identify with; Jack Nicholson's character or the other two?

I want to share something with you despite which characters you identify with; this is not as good as it gets. If you are going through some rough times emotionally, spiritually, physically,

financially, or whatever- this isn't it or if things are going well it doesn't have to stop there either. This is not the end of the story- it is only the beginning. During Jesus' time here on earth he tried to explain many things about who he was and his purpose and what he would do for those that believed in him. But many times people had difficulty catching on to his message. That's why he used parables to help them understand, to put it in their terms. So when he was talking with his followers about the kind of life he came to offer them, he had to put it in terms they could wrap their heads around. In John 10, he tries to tell them why he is here: **"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. ²But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. ³To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. ^{5(A)} A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers."** ⁶This figure of speech Jesus ^(B) used with them, but they ^(C) did not understand what he was saying to them.

⁷So Jesus again said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, ^(D) I am the door of the sheep. ⁸All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹I am the door. If anyone enters by me, ^(E) he will be saved and will go in and out and ^(E) find pasture. ¹⁰The thief comes only to steal and ^(G) kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. ^{11(H)} I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd ^(I) lays down his life for the sheep."

Did you catch that, he came so that they may have life and have it more abundantly. What is abundant? The definition is:

present in great quantity; more than adequate; oversufficient
well supplied; abounding.
richly supplied:

So, that means that God has a rich supply of great things in store for us, an over sufficient, well supplied abounding great quantity of life ready for us to take hold of if we will accept him as our savior and follow him. Seems easy right? But many of us are not living that way, we are like the boy who didn't see the circus but the parade, we think we are fine but really our lives can be so much more. Many people live a life that is in a rut. They do the same things in the same way every day of their lives. There is no excitement. There is no overflowing joy. They never see anything out of the ordinary. That is not the kind of life Jesus saved us to live! He saved us to live a life that is filled with His presence, power and glory, a life that is extraordinary and overflowing in the unusual. When a person is walking with the Lord they will be constantly seeing the Lord working in them and around them in wonderful, supernatural ways. Do you want a life that is different? Do you want a life that is filled with the wonder of God's work in

and around you? Paul says the way to have that kind of life is to get to God. He alone can give that kind of life to His children. The secret lies in being saved and in living close to the Father! Jesus promised His children that their lives would be different if they came to Him, **John 7:38**.

Yet, you can be saved and still live a life that is unfulfilling, redundant and dull. If you do not live as close to God as you can, many people think the Christian life is boring, the church is dead and that your life is no different than that the neighbor who lives next door. If you want to abundant life that Jesus can give, it will require you to walk in close communion with Him. This means you will have to start praying, reading your Bible, and finding your way to the church more often. You might even have to stop doing some of those things that hinder God from moving in your life like He wants to. Before we decide that the Christian life is dull and boring, let's make sure we have lives as close to the Lord as we can first. If you can get close to Him, your life will be anything but boring!

There are three things that can characterize an abundant life: joy, peace, and hope. Joy is not happiness, which is circumstantial. Happiness can come and go but true joy comes from deep within and cannot be dashed away by a situation. In Philippians 4:4 he tells us, **"Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice!"** This is coming from Paul who at the time he wrote this was sitting in prison because he was a follower of Jesus. So, you see circumstances don't create joy; the joy that God gives is everlasting when we surrender it all to him.

Then there is peace, which means to join together. Interesting enough worry means to pull apart. The life that is filled with the Lord's best is a life that is not pulled apart by worry, but it is one that rests in the promises and power of God. It is a life that knows true peace of heart. It knows that whatever may come in life, it is all in the hand of the Lord to either allow it or to stop it. It does not concern itself with what may happen, it merely leaves the choice in the hand of God knowing God will take care of all matters. **"And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."** **Philippians 4:7** Even when things seem impossible God can give us peace that doesn't make sense to the outside world, but to those believers who know Jesus, they understand. It's something that cannot be explained but experienced.

The final piece to an abundant life is hope. This is not wishful thinking which our society has taken it to mean. But hope is more; it is placing trust in God and relying on him to give you exactly what you need to fulfill the purpose he has given you.

Faith is the foundation for our abundant life. Having faith in God and Jesus his son to give us the joy, peace, and hope that he has promised all those who would believe, is what makes the abundant life possible.

What kind of life are you living? Is it one of abundance-overflowing with joy, peace, and hope? Or is it not much of a life, with the attitude that this is as good as it gets? You have the choice today and each day what kind of life you live; an abundant life that God has promised or a life that is dry and hopeless. The choice is yours. Which will you choose?