



“It’s Time to Get Our Feet Wet”

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John 10: 1-10 (NRSV)***

Our Scripture passage today is a parable of Jesus. The parables are a key part of the teachings of Jesus, forming approximately one third of His recorded teachings.

Like most of the parables, there expressed very deep meanings and presented in the form of word pictures stories that contained images that would have been familiar to those whom Jesus was speaking. In our passage today, I want to narrow our focus to that of verse 10 where Jesus states his Divine purpose...“He came that they (we) might have life and have it abundantly.”

Given the state of our economy, the word abundance is quickly fading from our vocabulary. An article in the Associated Press on Friday did not offer much comfort or hope...“The Federal Reserve has little power left to lift the economy out of its rut. Congress, with an election looming, has no appetite for more stimulus. Shoppers are reluctant to spend, and businesses are slow to hire.” In other words...abundance as the world knows it is not in our forecast.

Life seems to have a way through our experiences, events, people, and situations that sometimes robs us of the abundance that God desires for us in life. When reading this passage, my mind goes to the story found in Joshua, chapter 3, where the children of Israel were seeking to obtain the inheritance that was promised to them by God through Moses. After some 40 years of traveling through the desert, they finally stood on the banks of the swollen Jordan River, a seemingly impossible obstacle standing between them and the Promised Land—the land they sought for so long. (Jordan means *descender* or the one that takes you down, that is, kills your dreams, and drowns your faith).

Joshua was instructed by God to say to the children of Israel, who, by the way, were understandably disillusioned by the ominous raging waters of the Jordan, “You have to move because God says move.” In other words, you can't wait until the waters subside, you can't wait until you see the waters part in front of you, you can't wait you see a better opportunity—you must move now!

There is a Jordan for every one of us. Your Jordan may be different than mine, but the fact is that whatever it represents in your life, it stands between you and God's promise of abundance.

Jesus said that He came that we might have life and have it abundantly, yet often we either allow our Jordan to rob us of that which God wants for our lives, or we allow our fears to cause us to withdrawal or coil up and close our eyes to the promise of God, or we simply do not believe that God intends for us to have a life of abundance.

The word abundance conjures up different meanings for different people. The Greek word is "*peressos*," which means exceeding or supremely abundant, much more than all, extraordinary surpassing, uncommon, more remarkable, and when accompanied by the Greek word "*ecwsin*," which translates to repetition, we end up with a form of abundance that is more and more until it is overflowing, beyond comprehension.

The abundant life Jesus came to offer us, I believe, has three distinguishing characteristics that separate it from the abundance that the world knows.

II. Presence

This type of abundance does not happen in the ordinary course of life. It is an abundance that grows out of the abiding presence of God in our lives. We really don't know what we want in life. We may think we do, but often when we achieve that which we thought we wanted, we often find ourselves disappointed, unsatisfied, longing for something more.

At other times we seem to achieve abundance in our lives only to have life's circumstances diminish or take away the abundance that was the source of our over-confidence, or where we anchored our misguided faith.

That which truly fills our lives "*peressos ecwsin*" is that presence of God manifested in the person of the Holy Spirit transforming everything into abundance. The Holy Spirit was sent to us not only to be a companion but to be the One who leads us into an abundant life, here and now. The children of Israel wandered in the wilderness for 40 years being lead by God until they learned how to follow and trust the leadership of God Who was preparing them for the Promised Land?

We also must get to the place where we can forego:

Our right to be right
Our need to know

Our need to be in control

So that we be can lead by the Spirit of God into our promised land of abundance.

Often we find, in the end, that the Jordan that separates us from experiencing this fullness of abundance is in reality we ourselves! You may have heard the saying “let go and let God”? By allowing the presence of God to transform us, we are able to get out of the way of the blessing.

Sometimes for us to experience the abundance God has for our lives, we have to *get out of the way*. We need to listen to that small still voice that is telling to move, and we have to realize that the way to the abundance is through Jesus who, in our scripture passage today, draws the picture of Himself as the gateway through which we can pass into and out of the green pasture.

But being aware of the presence of God in our lives is not enough, for the Holy Spirit came not only to abide with us but to empower us.

III. Power

Through the Holy Spirit we have access to the awesome power of God. This power would be misdirected and likely misused by us without the abiding presence of God. Hence, once we have gotten out of the way and allowed God to have control of us then the power of God is manifested, tempered, and directed by the Holy Spirit to empower us to cross our Jordan, to remove whatever obstacles stand in the way of us embracing the abundance God has for us.

The Apostle Paul eluded to this power in Ephesians 1:18-21: “I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which He exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead....”

The power that gives life and the power that restores life is the power available to us to achieve the abundant life. How can we not experience this abundance regardless of our past, our financial or physical limitations?

Launey and I look forward to football season starting each year. We have been loyal fans of the 49ers both during the good years of Super Bowl victories and also during the lean years as the team has struggled to rebuild and to reach the glory it once enjoyed.

Some of you may be Raider fans and, well, all I can say is that I will pray for you.

I recently read the story of someone you may know if you are a local football fan. His name is Charlie Wedemeyer.

Charlie Wedemeyer was a high school teacher and football coach. He himself had been a high school athlete, quarterback of a football team in Honolulu, Hawaii. He was named Hawaii Prep Athlete of the 1960's. He later graduated from Michigan State University where he also played football. Charlie graduated with a Master's degree from Central Michigan University in 1969 and was the head football coach at Los Gatos High School in the late 1970's. Under his leadership Los Gatos won a sectional championship in 1985, and his teams won seven league championships. What you may not know is that while Charlie coached the Los Gatos team to these championships, he suffered from a disease commonly known as Lou Gehrig's disease. He was paralyzed by the disease and in 1983 it had also robbed him of his voice.

Not to be stopped from embracing the abundance God had given him, Charlie continued on with the help of his wife Lucy who, through lip reading, became the voice of Charlie and relayed the play calls on Charlie's behalf. Even as his health deteriorated, Wedemeyer remained a powerful motivational figure who delivered speeches worldwide through eye and lip movement interpreted by Lucy.

Charlie died in June of this year at the age of 64, but his life and that of his wife Lucy remains a tremendously powerful example of how God can get us across our Jordan because no one more than God wants you and me to have life and to have it abundantly!

IV. Purpose

The last characteristic of the abundant life Jesus offers us, a life defined by the presence and power of God, is a life of purpose. When Israel crossed into the Promised Land they had a purpose, a mandate from God to occupy the land. And if you read on through the book of Joshua in the Old Testament, you find that though it may have been difficult at times for them to embrace the promise of God, armed with the presence of God, they were made successful by the power of God to fulfill the purpose of God for their lives.

And so it is with us. The story of Charlie Wedemeyer is impressive but I bet that there are many stories in the lives of those of us here this morning that are also impressive. Because where God's purpose is allowed to advance, life changing, greater than imaginable things happen in our lives.

I have experienced such life changing experiences with God in my own life and I stand here this morning to give God the glory all that He has done in my life so far. I say so far, because I am still a work in process. I know God is not finished

with me yet and there is so much yet to be accomplished as I grow in the abundance God has brought to my life.

Long ago I gave up the notion of coincidence or chance in this life. I believe that much of what comes into our lives is the result of our own action or inaction, the result of our good and our bad decisions in life. We have the freedom to make our own choices, choose our own path in life and the Good News is that we do not have to be overcome by the mistakes or problems in our past but we can choose today to overcome our future. We can choose today to embrace the abundant life Jesus is offering us today. God in His wonderful mercy is able to transform even our mistakes and failures into blessing. It is really up to us.

The promise of God is like a gift. When someone offers you a gift at Christmas or at some other special occasion in your life, the gift is there for you, but you do not possess it or enjoy its benefits until you take the gift into your hand, remove the wrapper and receive it into your life. Sometimes we get the gifts that keep on giving—you know the ones—the gifts that you put into the closet and pass it on to someone else the first chance you get. But other times we receive gifts that we welcome into our lives...it is these gifts that we truly receive that bring joy and benefit into our lives. Such is the gift of God's abundance when we truly receive it into our lives.

But God's purposes are not just for the benefit of our personal lives.

Two weeks ago, Pastor Arlene declared that "we are rich." She read off a long list of achievements for Eden United Church of Christ over the past 145 years. It was impressive and wonderful to reflect on what God has done through this church. Yet, as wonderful as these achievements are, they do not hold a candle to what God can do through this church as we embrace the presence, power, and purpose of God today and in the years to come.

I believe that each and every one of us is here to be part of God's purpose for this church at this time. Collectively, we bring our experiences, our strengths and weaknesses, our talents and treasures together and offer them up as a sweet sacrifice so that God's purpose for this community can be realized at this time, under our watch.

But individually and collectively we must make the commitment, we must be willing to get our feet wet, armed by the Presence of God we will be made successful by the Power of God to fulfill the Purpose of God here in this place.

V. Conclusion

I am convinced that no matter how many days, weeks, years of life I have left on this planet, that God's grace and power are sufficient for me to fulfill God's purpose for my life, and I for one am getting my feet wet and moving in the direction of embracing all that God has in store for my life.

If you already have the abundance I have spoken about today, then dedicate yourself to spending however many days or years you have left on this earth helping others around you to obtain it.

If you have not experienced it, if it seems like an elusive dream, an unattainable goal, then I urge you today, right now, to take God at His word, join with me in getting our feet wet, holding up the ark of the covenant and the promise of God high above our heads as we tread out into our Jordan refusing to accept anything less than all that God has given us in this life.

As the Apostle Paul said in Hebrews 12:1-2: "...since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus as the author and perfecter of faith...."

The message today is that we should not only run with endurance, but holding onto the abundance that only God can provide so that through us and during our watch as members and leaders of Eden United Church of Christ, God may be glorified and His purposes achieved in our lifetime, in this community, in this state, in this nation, and yes even in this world wherever our influence can make a difference.

It is time to take the training wheels off
It is time to throw away the crutches
It is time to move from sight to faith
It is time to move from I Hope so to I know so
It is time to move from the milk to the meat
It is time to get our feet wet!

Jesus said, "I came that you may have life and have it abundantly!"