

Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> May 2020,  
Easter 4  
10am Zoom Service

John 10:1-10  
Acts 2:42-47

‘I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly’  
John 10:10

Reflection 1: *What did Jesus mean by ‘abundant life’?*

‘I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.’ Some have interpreted Jesus’s statement, as a promise that if we follow Jesus everything will be fine, we won’t get sick or have personal or financial crises. Does abundant life mean a fat wallet, the relationship of our dreams, a perfect job and vacations in Hawaii?

Looking at the context of Jesus’s statement, might make us think otherwise. Jesus utters ‘I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly’ after he has described himself as a Shepherd and then as a gate.



In Jesus’s day being a shepherd was hard impoverished graft, a thankless task fallen to a son or 2 daughters in the family, who were tasked with collecting sheep from multiple village households gated courtyards.



*Few families could afford to have a shepherd just for their own few sheep, so village families would share one shepherd.*

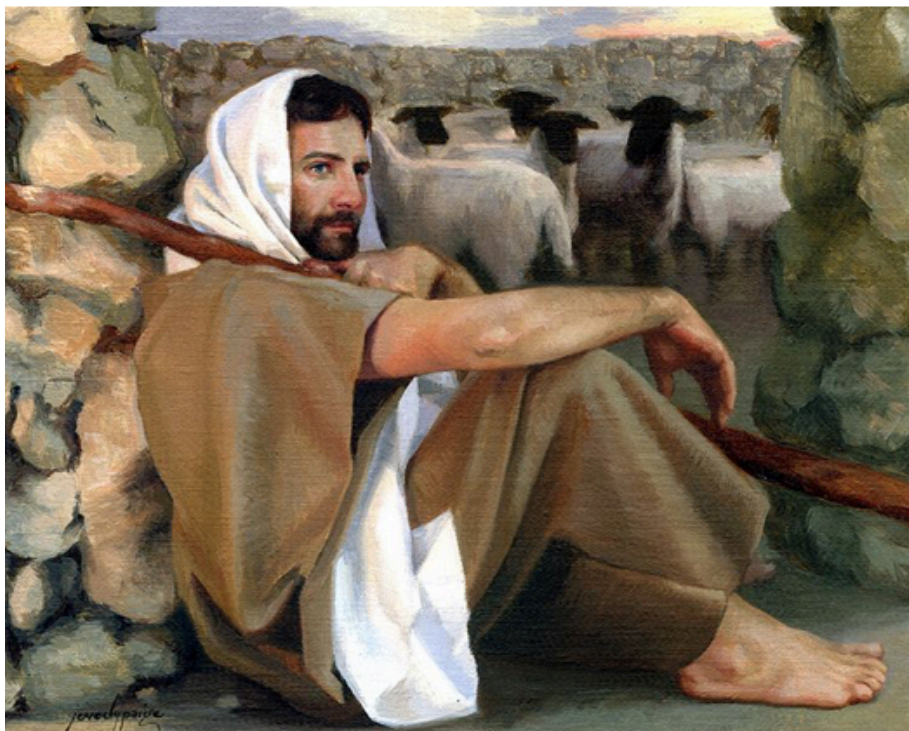


Getting a horse throat, they would round-up the sheep calling them by name one by one: 'long-ears', 'white-nose', 'brown spots' and then guide the sheep out of the village through rough and dangerous terrain, looking for pasture. Fending off wild animals, racking up

blisters, going after the wandering sheep, sleeping outside with a stone for a pillow while the sheep were out at pasture. It certainly wasn't a prosperity gospel dream job!

But by Jesus identifying himself as a Shepherd he is showing how he is fulfilling the Hebrew scriptures. Moses prays for the Israelites in Numbers (27:16-17): 'May the Lord, the God of the spirits of all mankind, appoint a man over this community to go out and come in before them, one who will lead them out and bring them in, so the Lord's people will not be like a sheep without a shepherd.' Jesus is *The Good Shepherd*, not like the ruling religious leaders of his day, bad shepherds, thieves and bandits, who are rebuked by God in Jeremiah (23:1-4) for destroying and scattering the sheep. Jesus is also making a seriously significant, some might call blasphemous, claim. By calling himself a good shepherd, he is presenting himself as God. Ezekiel 34:15 reads: 'I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep... says the Lord God.'(Ezekiel 34:15)

In verse 7 of our gospel reading, Jesus switches metaphors because his first hearers don't grasp the reality of what he is saying. So Jesus, speaks of himself as a gate. Out in the open pastures, makeshift sheep pens were found in the crag of a rock and the gate was provided courtesy of the Shepherd, a human shield. The shepherd as gate was a basic necessity to protect the lives of the sheep from thieves and wild animals.



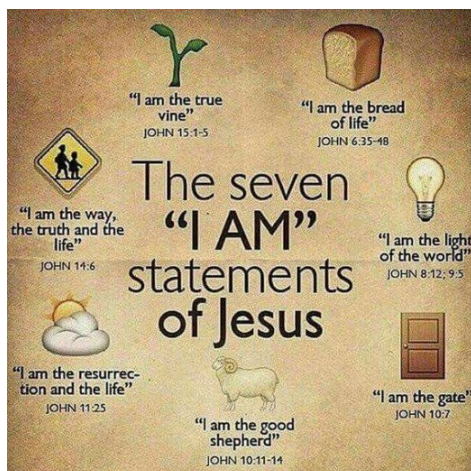
But a gate also allows freedom of passage. Jesus sets himself up as the open gate, which 'whoever enters by me, will be saved, and will be able to come in and go out and find pasture' (John 10:9). Jesus sets himself up as the gate to abundant eternal life. If we follow our Good Shepherd, he will lead us through the gateway from death to life eternal with the Trinity. But we don't have to wait until we die to

experience eternal life. If we are following Jesus as our Good Shepherd, we are already living that abundant eternal life, because we have Jesus living within us by his Spirit.

But what does it mean for Jesus to be a gate? Jesus in the verse following our gospel reading says 'I am the good shepherd [who]... lays down his life for the sheep' (John 10:11). Jesus goes beyond what any human Shepherd would do for their sheep. Jesus dies for us, his sheep, to save us from death.



Why did Jesus come? He came and entered our humanity, to freely lay down his life for us, his sheep. This abundant life that Jesus came to bring, is no other than *his* life. Jesus does an incredible exchange with us, he offers us his eternal, never-ending, everlasting life. He does this by dying, so that we can live - truly, abundantly, eternally live, *with* him. A life where we are never on our own, even when self-isolating.



John's gospel is famous for the 7 'I am' statements'. One of the other 'I am' statements is 'I am the way the truth and the life'. Jesus is *The* Life. Jesus has come, entered our broken world, to bring us life, *his* abundant life. Amen.

Reflection 2: *how can we embrace this abundant life Jesus offers his followers, particularly during this season of lockdown?*



How do we live an abundant life when our health is failing, we've just been made redundant, our marriage is falling apart, the kids are going crazy in lockdown and we can't pay our bills?

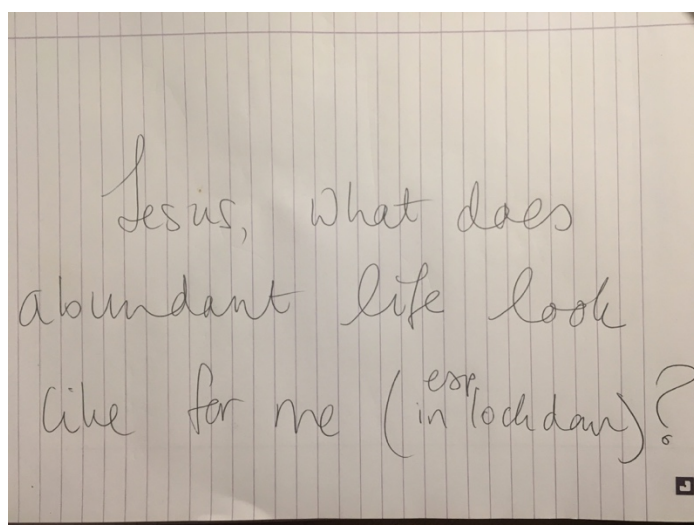
How do we live an abundant life during this season of lockdown when instead of abundance we have scarcity? When we can't get hold of store-cupboard essentials we took for granted, where there isn't an abundance of loo roll, eggs or flour. Instead we stare at empty shelves.

If abundant life is not about how many possessions we have (Luke 12:15), then perhaps we can embrace more easily during this time of scarcity, that life is more than food and drink. Jesus knows we need these necessities, but he points us to the source of all our needs, to life itself – Jesus. *The Life. Our life.*

Even when all else is stripped away, when we are frightened, our faces streaked with tears, mouths and noses hidden behind masks, as we walk through the darkest valley, of an invisible killer, we do not need to fear evil, because Jesus our shepherd is guiding us. He is walking ahead of us, each and every day. And when we lie down to sleep, he is right there with us, guarding us, watching over us, our gate to life everlasting.

It may be painful when we look at images of flocks of sheep following a Shepherd, as we hear the Acts of the apostles reading of the early gathered church breaking bread, when we are scattered, longing to be re-united as one. But, there are still opportunities of abundance in this barren wilderness. Today is Vocation Sunday. Churches across the church of England are being encouraged to think about what Jesus might be calling each member of that church to do.

We are all Jesus's sheep, but just like 'long-ears', 'white-nose' and 'brown spots' we have all been gifted with different gifts and talents. All are equally needed, all are equally valued. As we come to the end of this reflection can I ask you to pick up a pen and paper and write down the following: 'Jesus what does abundant life look like for me?'



Can I encourage you to take some time this week to pray with this as your focus, asking what Jesus might be calling you to do, to serve him and his flock, as you follow him. Your Shepherd, Your life. Amen.