

## Psalm 130

Out of the depths. I cry to you, O Lord...  
My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning.  
With the Lord there is steadfast love

## John 10:1-18

"I came that they may have life and have it abundantly."

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Abundant Life

Jesus said, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." This may be one of the most important verses in the entire Bible to me. In one of the churches I've served, it's emblazoned across the front of the chancel: "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."

Jesus says this was his whole purpose: that we would discover what God wants for us – the astonishing gift of life – not just lived, not just survived, but a life that thrives – lived fully, deeply, abundantly. This is God's dream for the world, for everyone, with no exceptions.

So it bothers me when people use this passage in John, or others, to say that Jesus had a narrow view of who was entitled to God's overflowing love. Some would say that the passage we just read divides us all into two camps – those who know Jesus' voice, and follow him, and those who don't, and get left behind.

Here at King's Chapel we're affiliated with Unitarian Universalists – UU's. The second of those U's, for Universalists, are those who early on in America's founding concluded that a God of all love grants salvation universally, to everyone. They wouldn't agree with the then dominant Puritan notion that some were chosen, predestined, and others were not. Rob Bell, a contemporary evangelical liberal has written about this in the just the last few years, a new discovery of an old idea that we firmly hold.

So this is bred in our bones here, at this place. We are convinced that nothing can ultimately separate us, or anyone, from God's love, not even death.

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I can picture Wendy now, standing at the back of the church that Sunday morning, after the service, talking with me and a few other church members. "Who knew?" she said, throwing up her arms, amazed. "I was raised in the church my whole life, but I had no idea. That stuff about Jesus saying he wanted us to have abundant life? Abundant life? Humph –I thought church was all about how sinful I was. That's what I always heard when I went".

Maybe I remember this scene so well because it was a glorious summer morning. Maybe I remember this scene so well because it was a glorious summer morning and just beyond this woman, outside, was bit of green grass, and beyond that a few houses, and beyond that, not too far, the ocean, with the sun glinting on it. We knew that all that awaited us soon, our morning service on Cape Cod in that little village church, now ended, we last few lingering together by the door, just talking.

Maybe I can still see her face and expression so vividly because both doors of the church were flung open wide and the sun was pouring in, framing her and our little group gathered to talk. Maybe I recall her whole face, her whole body, really, radiating because of that blaze of summer sunshine bathing her.

But you know, I think I remember the scene because it was such an Ah-Ha moment for me, as this woman shared with me the Ah Ha moment she'd had.

Somehow this woman, now in her 50's or 60's or 70's, seemed to have been freed from a burden that had weighed her down since she was a little girl attending church. That had clung to her shoulders in her teenaged years, when all of us fret over fitting in. That had permeated her adulthood – the all too familiar burden of seeming not quite good enough, an easy conclusion for all of us to reach in the midst of all the normal failures and successes we all face at work or home.

Somehow, whether it really had been taught to her at church, or whether it was just what she'd taken in--this notion that she was always sinful –frankly, this truth that all of us are –had saddled her failed marriage, making her feel worthless. Had eventually made going to church just too hard. Sometimes because of her own actions, she knew didn't measure up. Sometimes because of the way other people treated her, she became convinced of it. All the stuff of her normal human life seemed to have added up to push the point home.

This sense of how God saw her -- as always being a day late and a dollar short -- had shaped her understanding of who she was. No powerful and great God, one worthy of our worship, could possibly love her, not the way she was. Maybe no sane human being, in fact, could reasonably love her.

She was like our psalmist today: "Out of the depths, I cry to you, O Lord! My soul waits for the Lord, more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning." Her night was long, had seemed never-ending. And frankly, while she wanted to cry to God, and sometimes did, she thought the God who might answer would likely be disappointed in what he found.

So slowly she had stop calling. Just stayed away from church. Figured that if dawn might eventually come, it would do so on its own, and at best, it'd be a dim one. Then she'd heard of the little church in a town not too far away, the little place where I was getting to be a summer intern. I was just there for 8 weeks one summer,

so I can't claim to know completely what their secret was. But this woman and I both noticed that they had a mantra they kept using, their slogan: "No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here."

People seemed to come to that place just as they were – you didn't need to have it all together before you came; they assumed God might help you get it together after you'd arrived. And they seemed to think that probably none of us would ever really get it all together, and that was all right, too, because God loved us.

When that congregation gathered and shared in communion, this woman discovered, she was invited to join in, because the first time Jesus offered communion to his disciples, he did it the very same night that he knew -- he already knew – that one of them would betray him, and one of them-- his dear Peter -- would deny that he ever knew Jesus, and all of those disciples would run away, abandoning Jesus to the Roman soldiers who would kill him the next day. If Jesus gave communion to those – he certainly would give it to her, and to me. And to all of us.

You see, that's the breadth and depth of God's love. God's abundant love, spilled out and pouring over. A love that never, ever ends. The psalmist called it "steadfast" love. Jesus, in teaching about how to tell who the true Messiah was, said it would be the one who came to give *life* to us, abundant life, not any who might try to steal our sense of worth and beauty and life from us. Those are the false messiahs. The true savior is the one who came into this world, that we may have Life, and Have it Abundantly.

Who knew? She said. Abundant life? I only thought church was about how sinful I am.

My friends, hear these words of Jesus, precious and true: "I came that you may have life, and have it abundantly." When that is the message you hear, then you are hearing the words of the True Shepherd. Hold them fast. They are enough to make us come alight, ablaze, in radiant wonder!

Amen