

Evening Service - Communion Sunday

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Preacher: Rev Alex MacDonald

[0 : 00] Now, would you turn with me to that passage that we read in John's Gospel, John chapter 10, and particularly verses 9 to 11.

I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. Especially the words in verse 10. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

I suppose we all long to live life to the full, life to the max. But the reality is mostly so different.

The film Trainspotting, which is based on the book of the same name by Irvin Welsh, begins with a voiceover from the main character, Mark Renton.

[1 : 10] I'll read a little bit of it with expletives deleted. Choose life. Choose a job. Choose a career. Choose a family. Choose washing machines, cars, CD players, and electrical tin openers.

Choose sitting on that couch, watching mind-numbing, spirit-crushing game shows, stuffing junk food into your mouth. Choose rotting away at the end of it all.

Nothing more than an embarrassment to the selfish brats you spawn to replace yourself. Choose a future. Choose life. But why would I want to do a thing like that?

I chose not to choose life. I chose something else. And the reasons? There are no reasons. Who needs reasons when you've got heroin?

And at the end of the film, after he has given up heroin and then betrayed his friends in a drugs deal, he asks himself, So why did I do it?

[2 : 09] I could offer a million answers, all false. The truth is that I'm a bad person. But that's going to change. I'm going to change. This is the last of that sort of thing.

Now I'm cleaning up, moving on, going straight and choosing life. I'm looking forward to it already. I'm going to be just like you. The job, the family, the big television, the washing machine, the car, the CD player, the electrical tin opener.

Nine to five, good at golf, washing the car, index pension, tax exemption, cleaning the gutters, getting by, looking ahead to the day you die.

What is the point of such life? What is the point of either path he chose?

As the French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre said, life is absurd. And put in those terms, it seems to be for so many people.

[3 : 10] What is the point of all of that? There's a feeling of emptiness. The TV comedy show Blackadder, some character in it says, one is born, one runs up bills, one dies.

And that's life. There can be a great feeling of pointlessness to it all. A character in a video game says, life is nothing more but a grace period for turning the best of our genetic material into the next generation.

What's the point of that? John Lennon, one of the Beatles and one of the great songwriters of the past time, said, life is what happens to you when you're busy making other plans.

And of course, these feelings are not new. Shakespeare spoke of life being boring. He said, life is as tedious as a twice-told tale, vexing the dull ear of a drowsy man.

I wonder, do you feel tonight something of that pointlessness of life, or that life is boring, or that life is dull? For some people, life is just viewed as being trivial.

[4 : 24] Singer Rufus Wainwright says, life is a game, and true love is a trophy. Just a game, as trivial as that. Is that the way that life appears to you?

Or perhaps you're pessimistic about life. So many people, when you scratch beneath the surface, don't really have much hope for the future. Bertrand Russell, the great mathematician and atheist philosopher, said, brief and powerless is man's life.

On him and all his race, the slow, sure doom falls pitiless and dark. And our own Scottish Robert Burns, in his poem, despondency, said, O life, thou art a galling load, along a rough and weary road to wretches such as I.

For so many people, if you scratch beneath the surface of frivolity and the froth of pleasure-seeking, there's a pointlessness, there's a boring quality to life, there's a despondency, even a pessimism.

In contrast with all of that, Jesus here speaks of real life, life abundant, life to the full, life to the max.

[5 : 42] I want to think with you first about this expression here. He's offering us life. He came to give us life. Life abundant, or life to the full, life to the max.

Now, this is not the idea that most people have about religion. And the Christian religion in particular. Most people think that it's dull and boring, going to church.

It's all controlling and restricting. It's narrow and confined. It's a way of death rather than a way of life. And do you know this is exactly what Jesus is warning against here?

That kind of religious deadness. He speaks about the thief that comes only to steal and kill and destroy. And there he's speaking about religious people.

He's speaking about the people like the Pharisees. Because in the previous chapter here, in chapter 9, there's this amazing story of how Jesus heals a blind man.

[6 : 45] A man who was born blind. And you would think that would be one of the most amazing miracles that someone had ever seen. And you would think there would be great amazement and great rejoicing.

But all the Pharisees were concerned about was that Jesus had healed this man on the Sabbath day. Because according to their petty rules, not according to the Word of God and the Law of God, but according to their petty rules, you couldn't do such a good deed on the Sabbath day.

That's the deadness of religion that Jesus is speaking about here. And the deadness that has so often passed for religion. And that has done so much harm.

That's not the life that Jesus is speaking about. By contrast, Jesus gives life. Jesus, as he moved about, gave life to people.

He gives sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf. He makes the cripple walk and he cures the leper. He raises the dead and he preaches good news to the poor.

[7 : 56] Jesus took the Word of God out of the synagogues and temples where it was being strangled to death. And he put it on the streets and in fishing boats and on mountaintops.

He put it in the fields and the workshops and the marketplace and at the dinner table. That's what you read Jesus doing in the Gospel. Bringing life to where people were in all their struggles and in all their heartache and in all their pessimism.

Jesus put smiles on the face of children and tears in the eyes of a repentant woman. He gave courage to the fearful, strength to the weary, and hope to the hopeless.

And as he did all those things in his earthly ministry, he still does those things for those who will respond to him. Jesus wants the very best for you.

The word that is here translated abundantly or could be translated to the full or to the max, it's derived from the word beyond. It's beyond limits.

[9 : 09] It's overflowing. It's exceeding. It's extraordinary. That's the meaning of this word. So Jesus wants you to know the fullness of life here and now.

To be fulfilled. He wants you to go in and out and find pasture as it's put here in verse 9. Now that may seem a strange expression, but it's based on this parable he's telling us about how he is the good shepherd and we are like the sheep.

Now to go in and to go out and find pasture, that's fulfillment for a sheep. And he's saying just as the shepherd will bring fulfillment to the sheep, so he will bring fulfillment to us.

He'll bring real life to us, life to the full. But he wants more than just giving us a good quality of life here and now. He wants us to have eternal life.

In verse 28 he says, What is this eternal life? It's not just living forever.

[10 : 15] It is a different quality of life. This is what he says in chapter 17, verse 3, as he's speaking to his father in prayer. Now this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

That's the key to eternal life. That's the key to this amazing, new, abundant, overflowing life. It is knowing God and knowing Jesus his son, whom he has sent.

And once we know what Jesus is all about, once we know what his life is all about, once we know what he came to do in this world, once we understand it, once we grasp it, once we take it to heart, then we will know what life is really all about.

Because this is to know and to love and to trust God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. To have a living relationship with the living God for now and for eternity.

And I want to ask you tonight, do you know this life, this full, overflowing, extraordinary life? You may appear a very ordinary person, but if you know the Lord Jesus Christ, you've got this extraordinary life inside you.

[11 : 34] Or perhaps are you still trapped in the false dilemma that Irvin Welsh portrayed in Trainspotting? Between, on the one hand, a straight, materialistic, boring life, or on the other hand, an exciting, self-destructive way of life.

That seems to be the choice that's set before people today. But Jesus is saying there is a third way. There is something that is real life. There is life to the max in knowing him, the source of all life.

I want to speak now for a few minutes about the way to this life in verse 9. Because there is a door to this life.

There's an entrance into this life. Back in the late 60s, there was a group called The Doors. The lead singer was Jim Morrison. And they took the name from The Doors of Perception, a 1954 book by Aldous Huxley, detailing his experiences when taking the drug mescaline.

And in turn, he took that title from a statement by the poet William Blake in The Marriage of Heaven and Hell. This is the quote. You see, people have always longed for something beyond.

[13 : 11] Something beyond this dull, boring existence. And you may try to find it through drugs or through drink or through meditation or through being adrenaline junkies or through art or music or literature or whatever it is.

Everyone tries to find this something as beyond this dull, boring existence. But the truth is that we find no lasting satisfaction or fulfillment, only a temporary escape from our humdrum existence.

Jesus says, I am the door. The picture here is of the sheep pen or sheepfold with a wall or fence around it.

And there's a door or a gate in it to let the sheep come in. And the purpose of that was to keep the sheep safe at night. During the day, the sheep were out on the pasture.

But at night, they were brought into this sheepfold. Why? To keep them safe from the livestock rustlers or the wild animals, all these threats to their very life.

[14 : 17] And Jesus is saying to us that he is the way to safety for us. I am the door for the sheep. He is the way into this life to the max.

Indeed, he's the only way in. Because he said, I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me. These are among the exclusive claims of Jesus.

And as we look at the Lord Jesus Christ, we see someone utterly different from anyone else, from any philosopher, from any other teacher or prophet. We see someone whose life backed up his claims.

And so when he said, I am the way, the truth, and the life, no one comes to God except through me, people believed it. Because here was someone utterly unique who showed in his life and how he treated people the great love and purity and holiness of God.

Now Jesus here combines this with a picture of the shepherd. Because not only does he say, I am the door, he also says, I am the shepherd. Because how do the sheep find their way into safety?

[15 : 30] They listen to the voice of the shepherd and they follow him, as he says in verse 27. So to find our way into this amazing life, into this life to the max, we must listen to Jesus and follow him.

And that means that we trust him and believe him. You see, the sheep trusted the shepherd. In the east, the sheep follow the shepherd. And it's as if you have a pet or an animal, they trust you.

You have that kind of relationship with them. And the Lord Jesus is saying to us, we must trust him in the same way and follow him, believing that he is the one he claimed to be and that he has done the great amazing thing he's come to do to put us right with God and give us this amazing life.

But there's another interesting aspect to this because Jesus talks here about going in and out. He talks about going out again as well as coming in.

He uses the picture of the sheep coming in to safety for the night, but then going out again in the morning to graze. And you see, Jesus gives us a place of safety and security in God.

[16 : 44] And from there, he leads us out into life, into the world, into enjoyment and fulfillment in the world that he has created. You see, don't be fooled by the present droning voice of the media constantly saying in a kind of drip, drip fashion that Christianity is some dull, boring, insipid, or spoilsport thing.

Jesus is the Lord of life. He is the creator of all of life. He is the King of kings. Every area of life is ruled by him.

And whether you're going to work or whether you're engaging in music or art or whatever it is, the Lord Jesus is Lord there. And he will lead you there if you will trust him.

And he will lead you to fulfillment in these areas, wherever it is, to his glory. He is the Lord of the whole of life. You see, Jesus was a joiner.

He was a working man. He climbed mountains. He sailed the sea. He walked the streets. He mixed with the down-and-outs, the disabled, and the disreputable. And he even mixed with the self-righteous, religious people.

[17 : 59] But nothing stained his life. Instead, everywhere he went, he imparted life. His life touched and transformed.

And so if we know him and we trust him, then we have him to lead us into all of life. So tonight, do you know the touch of his life-giving hand?

This is the one who is the door. In Edinburgh, we have an annual Doors Open Day when buildings that aren't usually open to the general public throw open their doors and people can come in and find out about that building, its architecture, or its use, or its history, or whatever.

And we in our church in Becloot, we take part in that now. And it's been a great way of opening up the church to the community. And it's great for the church to open its doors to people in all sorts of ways.

But there's a far greater door that is wide open for you. The Lord Jesus Christ. For he's the way to God. And Jesus is saying to you tonight, the way is wide open for you to come.

[19 : 09] To come into this amazing life that is only available in Jesus. The source of all life. The eternal Son of God. And I want to say something now about the cost of this life.

In verse 11, I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. Some think that living life to the full is free because it ultimately gives nothing.

There's a famous song by Chris Christopherson called Me and Bobby McGee. Freedom's just another word for nothing left to lose. And nothing ain't worth nothing. But it's free.

But for other people, it's costly. It's costly following their dreams. It may cost them money. It may cost them their health.

It may cost them their status. It may cost them their marriage. It may cost them their sanity. But this life that Jesus gives is truly free.

[20 : 15] And it's not nothing that he gives. It's everything. And it is free to you because it was costly to him. The good shepherd laid down his life for the sheep.

The greatest price that could possibly be paid, he paid for your great life to the max. The greatest price that could be paid is the life of the eternal Son of God who came into this world and endured the blackness and God-forsakenness of the cross as he died in the place of sinners, as he gave his life for the sheep.

You see, there is a force that will destroy us. Like in Jesus' story here, like the wolf who destroy the sheep. There is a force that is destructive of our life.

What is that force? It's evil. It has its roots within us in sin and it is manipulated from the outside by the devil and it leads to death and hell.

It leads to eternal separation from God. There is only one who can deal with this enemy, the Son of God, the good shepherd of the sheep.

[21 : 39] And he has dealt with it by taking on himself the sins of the world by dying an atoning and redemptive death. The death that we should die, the separation from God, that alienation that we deserve, he took it upon himself as he cried out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

It meant death for him but life for us. It was done on our behalf but it was also done in our place. He said that he came to give his life as a ransom for many, literally a ransom in the place of many.

You know what a ransom is? You hear sometimes about someone's been kidnapped and they demand a ransom. A ransom is the price to set someone free.

The way it was used at the time the New Testament was written was say, for instance, a slave who was sold into slavery. They could only be set free by being redeemed. A price paid to set them free.

And that's what Jesus did. And the price demanded by the justice of God's law was death. And Jesus paid that life and paid it to the full.

[23 : 02] He took that guilt upon himself and gave us pardon. He took death and he gave us life. I wonder if you find all this difficult to accept that the death of someone 2,000 years ago could radically affect your destiny today.

Well, of course, things that happened a long time ago still affect us in many ways. the Romans invaded Britain around the same time, the first century A.D., slightly before as well.

That has affected us to this day. the fact that Latin has had a huge effect on our language. Or that later the Gales came from Ireland and still Gaelic is spoken here in Scotland.

Or the Angles and Saxons crossed over and brought what we now have as English. All these things happened in the past long ago but they still impact on us today.

And the great things that so many great people and men and individuals have done still resound to this day and impact on us. So just because something happened long ago doesn't mean to say it's not relevant to us today.

[24 : 17] But the reason it really is relevant is because this one who died on a cross 2,000 years ago rose again from the dead and is alive forevermore.

So that tonight you're not asked to remember a long dead Savior. You're asked to tonight come to a living Savior. One who gave his life for you one who has conquered death and one who in himself demonstrates that life that life to the max that is offered you in the gospel.

The thing that may be holding you back is perhaps just the idea that in your standing before God you have to rely upon someone else because in our pride we would like everything to depend on ourselves and of course that cannot be.

It cannot be because in ourselves we're sinners and rebels against God and we need a Savior. The picture is that if say we were drowning we need to rely on someone else to save us.

If you're on the tenth floor of a burning building you need someone to come and rescue you. If you're far underground in a collapsed mineshaft you need a rescue to be sent out to bring you back.

[25 : 56] These are pictures of the condition that we're in in our sin. A hopeless situation that we cannot save ourselves from because we cannot fulfill God's law and we cannot pay for the offense to God's law except with our own utter condemnation and destruction.

But the Lord Jesus Christ came. God the Father sent a rescuer a deliverer a Savior He is Christ the Lord and tonight He's offered to you in the Gospel.

To God be the glory great things He has done so loved He the world that He gave us His Son who yielded His life an atonement for sin and opened the life gate that all may go in.

If tonight you want that life to the max you have to enter through that life gate and you can do that only because Jesus gave His life as an atonement for sin.

As the children of Israel were about to enter the promised land Moses said to them see today I have set before you life and death now choose life and tonight the Gospel comes to every one of you and says I've set before you life and death I've set before you the death that is due to our sin but I've set before you also life to the max in Jesus Christ now choose life let's pray let's pray Amen I'm not nothing but I go through to the mater so let's pray