



Sunday April 30, 2023  
John 10:7-16 (Fourth Sunday in Easter)

Ascension Lutheran Church  
Pastor Tony Acompanado

*How do I find happiness and satisfaction in life?* It's a timeless question that many of us wrestle with at some point in life. After all, who doesn't desire to live a satisfied life filled with contentment and joy? Just scan the shelves of any bookstore, *those still exist, right*, or browse Amazon or any online book store and you'll find countless titles on the topic. I did a quick search and here's a few I found:

*Living Your Best Life. Life Worth Living. The Art of Happiness. The Happiness Project. Joy in the Little Things. The Life You Always Wanted.* And I also liked this one: *How to Stop Doubting your Greatness and Start Living an Awesome Life.* And then there's the one I'm definitely planning to get, *The Miracle Morning: The Not-So-Obvious Secret Guaranteed to Transform Your Life Before 8AM.*

If you take the time to really pay attention to what's happening around you then you'll see that we live in a world surrounded by unhappy and dissatisfied people. People everywhere are looking for answers to the emptiness they feel inside, and they'll try just about anything on the off chance that it *might* bring them some sort of satisfaction or happiness.

Perhaps this explains why there's so much divorce, drug dependency, alcohol abuse, criminal behavior, depression, pornography, eating disorders, emotional and psychological disorders, and thoughts of suicide. So, what's the solution then? Materialism and wealth? Greed and envy? Pleasure and enjoyment? Hatred and Rage? Power and prestige? Dishonesty and Division?

The problem, as we all know, is that often times life has a way of tripping us up and knocking us down. So how then can we capture this abundant life that Jesus promises and experience life at its best?

Well, sadly Jesus isn't the only one competing for our attention. Most of the ads that we're constantly being bombarded with also promise abundant life, but it's abundance understood strictly as *more* – more money, more possessions, more importance, more friends or followers, more this, more that...go ahead, you can fill in the blanks as well as I can of all the things promising to give us life.

Of course, there's a cost to buying into this conspiracy. Actually, it costs two things. First, you need to believe that you're inadequate – that you're not good enough and don't have enough. That you're not worthy of love and respect and happiness unless you purchase whatever's being advertised. You don't really need me to tell you that ads work by creating in us a sense of lack, a sense of profound inadequacy. The lure of the ads is that the only way to satisfy that lack is to buy the thing they're trying to sell you.

The second cost is that it's a lie. Whatever you buy – shoes, cell phones, cars, deodorant, whatever it is – it may be a great and useful thing in and of itself, but the bottom line is it's not going to fill that sense of need or rid you of that sense of lack. In fact, in time you'll most likely end up disappointed again, and then you may end up just going shopping again – or overeating, or taking another drink or another pill, or settling for someone who doesn't value you, or whatever it is – hoping that *this time* it'll work, and *now* you'll be good enough.



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In light of all this, hear the promise of Jesus again: *“I have come that they may have life, and have it abundantly.”* But Jesus doesn’t just make a promise, he puts his money where his mouth is. Or, more accurately, he puts his life where his promise is: *“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”* And *“I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.”* But why? Why does Jesus the Good Shepherd lay down his life?

To tell us that we are, in fact, *enough*. Jesus, in John’s Gospel, is the *Revealer* – the One who comes to make the invisible God visible and the unapproachable God accessible. Jesus comes to reveal that God loves the whole world without exceptions. Jesus comes to tell us that we are already beloved, that we are enough, that we don’t need shoes or books or cars or a reputation, relationship, high-status job, big bank account, list of achievements, or anything else to be deserving of God’s love. Jesus comes to show us that God’s unconditional and unending love is already ours.

But if we’re really being honest with ourselves, that can be hard to believe. Because there are so many messages and so much money and effort devoted to trying to tell us that we’re *not enough*, that *we’re not worthy of love*, and that *we need to earn acceptance*. Which is precisely why we should listen to even more of Jesus’ message: *“I lay down my life for the sheep,”* he says. *“I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.”*

So what then is this abundant life that Jesus speaks of? It’s a life found in Christ. Abundant living is a life filled with the things that are good for us. A life of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, faithfulness, compassion, humility, enthusiasm, confidence, honesty – a relationship with God. Abundant life is full of those things money can’t buy.

My friends, Jesus didn’t come just for the original group of disciples. He came also for us, and we too are invited to hear and believe this message of grace and acceptance and then share it with each other and all those we meet.

Today’s gospel reminds us of the love and sacrifice of Jesus our Good Shepherd – the one who comes to tell us that *we are enough* – enough to love, enough to die for, and most certainly enough to live for. Thanks be to God. Amen!