

## Abundant Life in the Good Shepherd 2026

It has been 21 days since the resurrection of Jesus. What have the believers been doing? Devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Acts 2:42 Are you still filled with the exhilaration and joy of Easter? Is there a lingering a quiet joy, and awe in the knowledge of the death and resurrection of Jesus that set us and all of creation free from sin and death? Do you have the abundant life Jesus promised?

What does abundant life mean to you? Trusting that many, if not all of us, have seen the images of earth from space, were you moved by the vivid beauty of our glowing blue planet? The wonder of it! On planet earth, life is abundant. There are 8.28 billion people, of insects 10 quintillion – that is 10 to the 19 power, 130 billion wild animals, trillions of fish, plus a staggering bio - mass of plant life. Abundant life – if it is more than numbers, what is the abundant life Jesus came to give to us?

Jesus said, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." He is addressing a group of Pharisees and others gathered near. Previously, the Pharisees challenged the healing of the man born blind, and then, expelled him from the temple, when they could not coerce him or his parents to confess that he had not been blind at all, that his healing was nothing more than a

sham. So, Jesus has been speaking of seeing and blindness, sin, judgement, and life. He has told them that to not see the truth is to be blind and so remain in sin. The Pharisees said, “Surely, we are not blind, are we?”

Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him and the sheep hear his voice.”

I have heard it complained – in an amused way - that it is not very flattering to be considered a sheep or a lamb – an animal considered to rather, shall we say dumb? Not a serious complaint, of course; the image of God’s people as sheep is not one of attributes, but of relationship. Of trust.

God’s people follow the voice that calls them to love, peace, forgiveness and mercy in the same way as sheep and lambs follow the voice of the shepherd. The shepherd leads the sheep; he knows them, each one, and calls them by name. He goes ahead of them and they follow. They follow not because they are stupid, but because they know the shepherd, know the shepherd is trustworthy. Trust and humility is the lesson of the sheep.

Still speaking of the sheep who follow, Jesus said to all who were listening: “I have come that they might have life and have it abundantly.” What is abundant life? Surely Jesus was not speaking of numbers, amounts, but rather of quality. The quality of abundance. Plenteous, overflowing is a dictionary description of it. Maybe we could consider that abundant life begins in the heart with trust and gratitude. Gratitude for the gift of life; waking each morning with gratitude for another day, trusting in God’s loving presence and guidance.

And we could say abundant life is a life lived without fear of death, without fear of the dark that stalks the world, without fear of being lost to one’s self in the clamor of the world and the very real difficulties and pain every life encounters. A life lived with purpose and meaning, knowing that every life, your life, is precious to God not for accomplishment, but for itself - beloved by God always.

Consider, too, that abundant life was described thousands of years ago in a psalm that Jesus knew well. It is the psalm we prayed today. A psalm beloved around the world, so loved even by non-believers that it is sometimes called the secular psalm. It has become an icon of comfort and encouragement associated with moments of danger and distress, particularly at funerals. Yet, the main theme of the 23<sup>rd</sup> psalm is life – life as lived with God as shepherd.

In this psalm we hear that with God as shepherd all that is needed is supplied. Guidance, blessing, protection. It begins with the phrase, *“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.”* In this psalm we hear the basic necessities of life are supplied: Food, Drink, Security, Guidance and Protection. In the context of relationship, there is an abundance of life. All that is needed ultimately comes from God, who is with us all our lives; he supplies the household of his children with what they need to live as family with him.

Of course, needing and wanting are two different things. Our wants have grown very large, spectacularly so. The more we have, it would seem, the more we want. What would have been considered incredible luxuries in our forbearers’ day, are now considered ordinary necessities. We are helped into the way of always wanting more, by a constant stream of enticement from every sort of media - contemporary shepherds, as it were, to lead, scatter, and harm the sheep. Human pride and greed beckon always onward the desire for more of everything. Too often, even as it deprives others of even humble needs.

Jesus calls you by your name. Invites you to follow, to participate in abundant life. God as shepherd brings us into a community of life, a home that is ours forever. Eucharistic life – the bread and wine of life, the food and drink that are the body of Christ and the community of faith, the family of believers,

God's own lambs. Life without fear of death, life lived in the promise of everlasting life with God.

Do not let the Easter flame of joy and faith fade as if the resurrection were a holiday that is over and one moves on. Guard your hope, nourish your faith, strengthen your love. Bring all your fear, hurt, worry, edgy doubt, your hope and tenuous joy to the table of the Lord, to the supper of the lamb. The Good Shepherd will meet you there. There you will find solace, strength, blessing and renewal of the life of faith. Abundant life begins in the heart, begins in love, in the willingness to forgive, to offer mercy, and inspire hope. It resides in the soul and spirit, in the mind's memory of all God's blessings - and in the sharing of these gifts.

Easter is not over – Easter is today and every day. It is the abundant life Jesus promised. Keep the resurrection in your heart today and share the joy of it, the hope, and the blessing of it with someone in need of it today. Amen.