

## Altricial Life

### John 10:10

In two weeks' time my first born gets married. I'm excited . . . and the lead-up to the wedding has given me pause to think back over her life . . . right back to her birth. What an amazing experience that was . . . to be a father for the first time! In fact, the birth of each of my children have been three of the most incredible experiences of my life! Each time it was wonderful . . . each time it was amazing . . . each time was a joyous celebration of life. That in-between moment between womb and world . . . and . . . suddenly . . . a breath . . . and a cry . . . both at the same time . . . the sights and sounds of life invading my senses . . . new life!

In those moments of birth we catch a glimpse of what life is all about. As I held my kids in my hands – fragile, precious new life – it was more than just the physical act of breathing and heart pumping . . . more than a cry to clear the lungs . . . there was something about the holding . . . the connecting . . . something about the relationship we now shared . . . that connecting is what life is all about. And for a brief period of time we shared as close to perfect relationship that two human beings could ever share this side of heaven: unmitigated love mixed with total trust. That's life . . . authentic life . . . abundant life!

That's the kind of life Jesus promises in the mishmash of metaphors he uses in this story about the sheepfold and the gate and the thieves. Authentic life characterized by love and trust. And, you can't talk about love and trust without talking about relationships. Someone can be existing – breathing . . . heart beating – but, without relationships with other human beings they can't have abundant life. When children are born, without someone to hold them, to feed them, to care for them, they would not have life. Those connections with other human beings are as vital to life as are lungs working and heart pumping.

The poet John Donne got it right when he said: "No man is an island, entire of itself. Each is a piece of the continent, part of the main".

No human being is an island. Life can't be lived alone. Not authentic life. Not abundant life. From the moment we're born we have this irresistible desire for that abundant life. We want it . . . we want to experience it. Remember how during the Covid lockdowns we had to find creative ways to connect? I'm sure it wasn't just the virus that killed people. My father died during the lockdowns. Before Covid my mother would visit him in the nursing home every day without fail and then, suddenly, she wasn't allowed to see him for three months. I'm sure that lack of contact hastened his death.

We want a life of connection . . . abundant life . . . and yet from the moment we're born so much of what happens in our world . . . so much of how we human beings operate . . . doesn't give life or sustain life, or connect us to life . . . it does the opposite. We act and speak in ways that restrict life . . . steal life . . . even destroy life.

And, it's not just the husband who hits his wife . . . it's not just the bloke addicted to internet pornography . . . it's not just the teenager out every weekend binge drinking till she can't stand up . . . it's not just the terrible wars that dominate our TV screens . . . it's the seemingly little things all of us do or say . . . a cynical comment here . . . a bit of gossip there . . . the casual putdown . . . a condescending look. These things don't build up relationships, they damage them. And, whenever we damage, or destroy, relationships we put an obstacle in the way of achieving the abundant life every human being desires.

And, every time we put an obstacle in the way of relationships with others, we put an obstacle in the way of our relationship with God! God who gave us life in the first place. It's kind of like slapping God in the face. How many times do we do that . . . each day?

So, it's probably obvious by now that that authentic, abundant life would remain a pipe dream if it were left up to human beings to achieve . . . even if were left up to good, respectable church goers. When it comes to living life to the fullest . . . living it abundantly . . . we will always fall short . . . in the end death will always steal life, and the joy of life, away.

But, just a few weeks ago we shouted: "He is risen!" When Jesus said he had come to bring abundant life it wasn't an idle promise. Easter is our proof of that. "He is risen" means the ultimate thief of life has been held to account. The power death has to separate us from life has been defeated. "He is risen!" is a victory cry . . . for Jesus and for us. We don't have to be lured by the false advertising of worldly success and possessions and power. Real life isn't found there . . . it's found in a relationship with Jesus. Jesus has drawn us into his continent away from our island fortresses. Or, to use, his own image: he's opened the gate to the sheepfold where the greenest pastures are and he calls us in.

He came that we might have abundant life. How did that happen? Well, Jesus came into the world as a new born baby . . . no hospital staff . . . no obstetrician . . . no anaesthetic . . . just a mother and a baby . . . totally dependent on each other . . . he totally dependent on her for life . . . she totally dependent on him for life. Through Jesus, God shared the perfect relationship with humanity: unmitigated love combined with total trust. That's how it was for Jesus . . . he loved us right to the end . . . right to the cross . . . refusing to be lured away . . . trusting in a God who abandoned him . . . trusting for us as we abandon God . . . trusting that even in death there is life.

That's why Easter is such a joyful celebration . . . a celebration of life . . . a celebration of connection and relationship . . . Jesus' trust connects us once and for all with God's love . . . with God's grace . . . with God's forgiveness . . . with God's life. It's ours now.

So, with that most important, life-giving relationship sorted out we can get on with all the other relationships we have. We can get on with living life abundantly . . . even when faced with death! Because of Jesus we can dare to believe abundant life can also be found in the relationships we have with each other. Because of Jesus you can hold your tongue when you would normally lash out . . . you can swallow that juicy bit of gossip you would normally pass on . . . you can speak words of encouragement even when you feel like criticizing . . . you can let go of that grudge . . . and you can say sorry when you've hurt someone else . . . you can open yourself to be loved and to love . . . you can trust.

There's abundant life to be lived and that's the way to live it. It can be terrifying and exciting and amazing and difficult . . . just like the birth of a baby . . . but, it's life . . . life as Jesus knows it . . . life as Jesus gives it . . . authentic life . . . real life . . . abundant life . . . all there is to do now is to live it.

Go for it!

Amen.

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