What Is Abundant Life?

Scripture Background

*This information isn't meant to be read aloud, but as background. If helpful, share some of it in conversation with the group.*

The passage from the Acts of the Apostles in the first reading recounts how quickly Christianity exploded in the early days after Jesus’ resurrection. The coming of the Holy Spirit emboldened bumbling, imperfect Peter who now begins to preach powerfully, attracting many Jews to follow Jesus. After his speech, 3,000 people came forward in response, requesting baptism.

Opening Prayer

*Pray the following aloud together, beginning with the Sign of the Cross:*

+ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Good and Gracious God, thank you for this gathering to reflect on your Word of Life.

Open our eyes and ears so that we may see and hear the message you have for us today.

We ask this in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Gospel Reading: John 10:1-10

*Ask someone to read this passage aloud, then pause for a minute of silence.*

*Ask:* What struck you about this reading or the liturgy this week?

Allow for sharing. Move on to the next section once the sharing has died down.

Reflections on the Reading

*Invite each person in the circle to read one paragraph aloud:*

Today’s reading emphasizes that Jesus is the Good Shepherd and the gate for the sheep. For Jesus’ listeners—farmers, ranchers, and others steeped in an agricultural lifestyle—the metaphor was comforting. To us in the 21st century, many of whom have had little, if any, experience with sheep, the metaphor is less powerful.

The last line becomes especially important, then. “I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly.” Whether or
not we can imagine ourselves as sheep following the shepherd, Jesus, we can focus on his statement that he wants us to enjoy abundant life.

What does it mean to have abundant life? It *doesn’t* mean that God wants us to have an abundance of “things,” which can’t bring fulfillment by themselves. Abundant life as Jesus preached about it means a life of joy, fulfillment, love, and freedom from want. Jesus wants us to have life in its fullness, here and now, not just after we die.

Unfortunately, some of us were raised to believe that a life of discipleship dooms us to a life of deprivation, boredom, and no fun. We might think, consciously or not, that we deserve punishment or that we must work to earn God’s love. Or we might assume that we just have to accept this life of drudgery to get to heaven (abundance) in the next life. Yet so many of Jesus’ teachings and his behavior pointed to the fact that he wants us to have the fullness of life now, not only in the future. He wanted to see people cured of their illnesses, freed from the injustices that kept the poor and the outcasts excluded from the community. He wanted people to celebrate rather than mourn.

If we listen for Jesus’ voice, we can distinguish it from the voice of others in our world because Jesus’ voice will lead to a more abundant life for us. If some voice (of a family member, peer, advertising, etc.) leaves us feeling insecure, inadequate, fearful, or anxious, that is not the voice of our shepherd. Jesus’ voice always leads to a more profound peace, joy, comfort, and strength.

**Questions for Discussion**

*Read each question aloud, one at a time, followed by time for sharing.*

1. Share about a time when you have followed an invitation that you felt was from Jesus. How did you know the “voice” was from God?

2. When have you experienced great life from responding to Jesus’ voice? How did it play out for you?

3. Describe a time when you went astray by following another shepherd who didn’t care for you the way a good shepherd cares for his sheep. How did you find your way back to the sheepfold?

**Closing Prayer**

*Pray the following aloud together:*

Jesus, may what we have heard and discussed today inspire us to leave here committed to living as more faithful disciples.

Amen.