

How Does Flourishing Find Us?

Sermon Notes for May 7 2017 at Brentwood



Ps 23 and John 10:1-10

**The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy.
I came that they might have life, and have it abundantly.
(John 10:10)**

Provocative Ponderings that Call Forth Our Potential in Christ

- It's one of Christianity's most powerful images – Jesus as the good shepherd – the provider & the protector & the pointer to the right way to green pastures – the image carries with it a sense of being loved, cared for, defended against all threats – especially in times of deep distress, when we feel overwhelmed with loss, death, and destruction – and in the verses that follow those that Rick read this morning, this loving defense of us goes beyond the point of death – Jesus' promise that he will lay down his life in order for us to have abundant life and that he will be with us constantly in that life - that is his purpose and his mission – act with the Father in the Spirit so we can all have abundant life – that seems to me to be the real focus of this passage – what God does to enable us to flourish in love of God, love of others, and love of self
- There's a dynamic and flow of God's actions here that is important to remember, especially as prominent and powerful individuals increasingly claim that they can fix all of our problems themselves – just trust me – I have all the answers – don't worry – be servile – I will solve all your problems for you – and in that servility, you will be safe - that's a powerful temptation in the face of decline and danger – when things seems to be getting worse that they were and when packs of ravenous wolves surround us, determined to steal our lives and destroy everything that is dear to us – this shallow promise of security lay at the heart of the Devil's temptations of Jesus in the wilderness – worship me and I will give you all the prosperity, the power, and the prestige you can imagine in this world – but Jesus resisted and kept turning to what God wanted him to do – to the kind of abundance and flourishing that God intended for his human companions in the mission of bringing SHALOM to the whole of creation
- There has been a lot of attention paid in recent years, perhaps because of the crises we face in contemporary society, to the art and science of flourishing – what is it? - how does it happen? – and especially, how can **we** find it? – in *The Art of Flourishing* (2011), Jeffrey Rubin summarizes the elements in flourishing in this way – “We flourish when we take great care of ourselves, connect with spirituality, widen our moral imaginations, cultivate ethical accountability, and live authentically.” – that's a pretty good list – self-caring, spiritual, ethical, and authentic – all of those things are crucial in any Christian understanding of flourishing in abundant life
- But here's the crucial added dimension upon which a follower of Jesus would insist – all of this is initiated and nourished by God – it depends on the constant working and influence of God's love seen most clearly and powerfully in Jesus, the Christ – and the image of Jesus Christ as the Good Shepherd captures this well – provider, protector, pointer to the green pastures and flowing streams of flourishing

Notes for a sermon preached by Brian Fraser,
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At this point in our ponderings, then ...

I think being clear about the source of our flourishing is vital – it is the love of the Good Shepherd that finds us, that cares for us because of that love – that guides us ever more deeply into the flourishing that flows from that love – this abundant life that Jesus' spoke of with his disciples those many years ago is God's gift to us, sealed in the sacrifice Jesus made for us.