

“Choose Life in All Its Fullness!”

This Text reveals the importance of the life God offers everyone. It also reminds us of the way Jesus lived, so it becomes a powerful expression of the kind of life we are called to live. Verse 10 set the stage when it reported Jesus saying, ***“The thief comes only in order to steal, kill, and destroy. I have come in order that you might have life — life in all its fullness.”*** God wants us to live this abundant life!

Jesus used several different terms for the life he came to enable everyone to live. Unfortunately, the public understanding of those titles for the life Jesus came to bring us encourages most people to think those types of lives are very different from one another. Specifically, two titles Jesus used in this Scripture Reading, ***“life — life in all its fullness”*** and ***“eternal life”*** are not generally considered to mean the same thing. However, the definition most people think of for ***“eternal life”*** is one, which exclusively describes a life one has only after death as a reward for living a good versus bad mortal life. That common understanding of ***“eternal life”*** was not what Jesus meant when he talked about it. Further, according to Jesus, the way one comes to have this life is not merely the result of being good or bad. The remainder of the Reading sheds light on how ***“life — life in all its fullness”*** is different from the life encouraged by society – the ways of the world.

Jesus explained a major part of his role is the revealing of this New Life in its totality when he said in vs. 17-18, ***“The Father loves me because I am willing to give up my life, in order that I may receive it back again. No one takes my life away from me. I give it up of my own free will. I have the right to give it up, and I have the right to take it back. This is what my Father has commanded me to do.”*** Jesus knew he was living a new kind of life – one we’ll call the New Life in Christ. He lived out this way of self-giving and sacrificial love in accordance with the Divine Parent’s Will and Purpose. By manifesting the Divine Parent’s Self-Giving and Sacrificial Love for us, Jesus has revealed the **New Life – “Eternal Life”**, which we have in relationship with God through Jesus – God’s Son – the embodiment of God’s Love.

But that is just half of how Jesus’ coming into the world from God enables us to ***“have life — life in all its fullness.”*** The second part is what Jesus was referring to when he said, ***“I have the right to give it up, and I have the right to take it back.”*** Taking his life back is the Resurrection! A major purpose of his rising from the dead is to demonstrate he really is the Son of God – so we, his sheep, will be able to believe he is the Son of God and so we also believe God Forgives us, Offers us healing, and Welcomes us into the New Relationship with the Divine Parent and one another through the Almighty’s Self-Giving and Sacrificial Love – as a gift. The reason our Creator sent the Son of God – the Word into the world was to prove to us the Divine Parent’s Self-Giving and Sacrificial Love Forgives, Heals, and Reconciles us with God and one another in a New Relationship with God, along with giving us the New Life in Christ – ***“eternal life”*** – the Life Jesus lived out that of self-giving and sacrificial love – the life of citizens of God’s Kingdom.

All that is contrary to the legalistic Jewish interpretation encouraged by the Synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke – that Jesus died as the sacrifice to satisfy an angry God, so we are forever forgiven. Some may wonder, how can that be – how can there be such a difference in understanding? Part of the reason is because Biblical scholars, frequently considered this gospel to be purely theological, instead of as an authentic first hand testimony of what Jesus actually said. They have not closely considered these less known parts of the Gospel of John and their implications when taking the gospel of Jesus Christ together as a whole. They have, instead, allowed the terse and less complete reports from the sources for the Synoptic gospels to fully define Jesus’ self-description. But how different is the picture I have shared of today’s Scripture from what Jesus told Nicodemus as reported in John 3:14-17? Remember, Jesus said, ***“As Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the desert, in the same way the Son of Man must be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. For God loved the world so much that He gave His Only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not die but have eternal life. For God did not***

send His Son into the world to be its Judge, but to be its Savior.”

Jesus’ willingness **“to give up”** his life was and continues to be a radical approach! We don’t see many folks doing it. Few people think intentionally giving up one’s actual life for something or someone is very smart or mentally stable. The response of the people, who heard Jesus making that announcement, was very much as the reaction would be from most folks today. The gospel reported in vs. 19-21, **“Again there was a division among the people because of these words. Many of them were saying, ‘He has a demon! He is crazy! Why do you listen to him?’ But others were saying, ‘A man with a demon could not talk like this! How could a demon give sight to blind people?’”** Contemporary culture ridicules us when we forsake selfishness and follow the way of self-giving and sacrificial loving life.

Perhaps, it was some of the same persons, who demanded Jesus plainly tell them whether or not he was the Messiah. His response indicated some of why they were unwilling to believe in him or to follow his example. In vs. 25-27, **“Jesus answered, ‘I have already told you, but you would not believe me. The deeds I do by my Father’s authority speak on my behalf; but you will not believe, for you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.’”** Those who believe listen to him and they follow his example. This is a very important piece of insight! Are we listening to him and following his example?

Continuing on, in vs. 28-29 Jesus shared the comforting Good News, **“I give them eternal life, and they shall never die.”** If we stop there, then it seems **“eternal life”** may just mean life after death. But Jesus did not stop speaking, instead he went on to say, **“No one can snatch them away from me. What my Father has given me is greater than everything, and no one can snatch them away from the Father’s care. The Father and I are one.”** If one believes, listens’ to Jesus’ voice – follows his teachings and example, then even as a person lives this mortal life – we have begun to live the **“eternal life”** or life belonging to the realm of God’s Fulfilled Kingdom – the eternal. So, the promised **“eternal life”** is not just life after death. It is also the **New Life in Christ**, which transcends human history and belongs to the timeless realm of God’s Self-Giving and Sacrificial Love. We are promised nothing can take us away from our Divine Parent’s Care and Self-Giving Love.

What is at issue today for us is whether or not we will choose **“life — life in all its fullness.”** We are called by Jesus Christ to believe he is the Messiah – the Anointed or Chosen One of God – God’s Son. We are to discern he is the Word – the embodiment of God’s Self-Giving and Sacrificial Love for us! You and I can believe this Good News because the Divine Parent sent the Only Son into the world for us and raised him from the dead to prove the Almighty’s testimony about Jesus being the Son of God.

Believing Jesus Christ – the Messiah is the Crucified and Risen Son of God, we are called to listen to his voice – follow his teachings and example – choose the **New Life in Christ – “eternal life”** – also, embody self-giving and sacrificial love. There are many things which can prevent us from following this call. Our love of the self-centered and the selfish way of life, which is encouraged by the world can stop us – put us in bondage to the false gods of our society. We can give in to the world’s attempts to intimidate – call us demon possessed – crazy – mad.

Will you and I live out the generosity demonstrated in the self-giving and sacrificial loving life and death of Jesus Christ? Will we want and, choose to **“have life — life in all its fullness”**? Believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God, who embodies the Divine Parent’s Self-Giving and Sacrificial Love for us as our Crucified and Risen Savior. **Listen to his voice – follow his example of the New Life in Christ – Eternal Life! Choose to live the “eternal life” now – “have life — life in all its fullness”!** Amen.