

Beyond Monochrome
Isaiah 55:1-9; Luke 13:1-9

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What is abundant life? How do you measure abundant life? What is the sign we are living abundant lives? Is it good health? Money in the bank? Are we living in a place we enjoy? Maybe children are a sign of abundant life? Perhaps someone who loves us unreservedly? Or maybe it's meaningful work? Having a good reason to get up in the morning?

What if I told you, you could have all these things, and I could offer you something even more? You could keep everything you've got, and enjoy them all your days, and I could give you something that would make you appreciate them even more?

Imagine you're in a Middle-Eastern Bazaar. You're in Turkey or Israel or Syria. The aisles are crooked and narrow, the shops are small and close together with goods for sale spilling out into the path. All around you vendors are shouting, "Come and buy! Come and buy! Come and buy my goods. Don't waste your money on those other things. They won't satisfy you. I have what you really need." Would you be interested? Would you stop and look?

This is the setting for our Old Testament Lesson. The people are in exile in Babylon. Life is going well. They're not oppressed. They're allowed to live in Jewish communities. They can worship. Life is good. But could it be better? The prophet calls out, "I have something better. It's free. Come, come and see what I have. Taste what I am offering you."

What is the prophet offering? What is so delightful, yet absolutely free? The answer, of course, is real relationship with God. To those without money the prophet is offering something that has no price: a genuine relationship with God.

Jesus is saying much the same thing, but from a very different angle. As we said last week, Jesus is in the Galilee region, the NE part of the country. He is making his way to Jerusalem.

The crowds tell him how Pilate has recently had some Galileans killed while they were making a sacrifice at the Temple in Jerusalem. In the Gospels, Pilate comes across as weak, hesitant. The historical record tells us Pilate was in fact recalled to Rome for excessive cruelty. Whatever else he was, Pilate was not weak or hesitant.

Could anything be worse, the people ask, than being killed while making a sacrifice to God? Could anything be worse? Jesus says yes, he knows something much worse.

A tower has fallen on some innocent people and killed them. How horrible. You're walking down the street and out of the blue a building collapses on you and kills you. You're perfectly innocent. You're just walking down the street and suddenly you're dead. Could anything be worse? Jesus says yes, he knows something much worse.

What is worse is dying without knowing the fullness of God's love. What is worse is dying without having repented and experiencing God's great love first-hand.

Many people, and we all know some, many people believe they are living the good life. They honestly believe they are living wonderful, abundant lives. And I'm sure in many respects their lives are wonderful. People love them, they have meaningful work, they are fit and healthy and have most everything they need. All great and good and we're very glad for them.

But what Isaiah is saying, and what Jesus is saying, and what you and I know so well, is there is more. There is something else you can have that will make everything else so much more meaningful and powerful for you.

Imagine being born completely colorblind. Not just blue-green or something like that but completely colorblind. Your world is like an old-time photograph. All you can see are shades of gray. It's a good world. There's plenty to see. And if gray is all you've ever known you're perfectly content.

And then imagine someone gives you glasses that let you see the world in color. You can see the world in color for the very first time. All the people and things and places that bring so much meaning and power and purpose to your life, now you can see them in color for the very first time.

That's the difference God makes in our lives. That is what being in a right relationship with God does for us. Our job, our family, our health, our work are all still there but now we appreciate them so much more.

When we receive bread and wine without price, when we repent for our sinfulness, when we walk the way of the cross, when we feed the hungry, when we protect the powerless, when we comfort the heartbroken and befriend the lonely, we see the world differently. We see the world in the fulness of God's love.

Friends, this is what we do. We stand in the marketplace of the world and offer a different way of life. We offer for free the priceless gift waiting for us all. As Christians, we tell the world what we know to be true. We can go beyond monochrome and experience abundant life – because this is how much God loves us. Thanks be to God! Amen.