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Life and Life Abundant
The Way — Jesus' Teachings, Week 1 (Sunday Before Lent)

Today we begin our new message series. This is something I am very excited to bring you! We will begin today to look in real depth, at what Jesus taught.

Inspired by Rob Bell, whom I saw at the National Youth Workers Convention in 2004, I felt pushed to explore this fundamental topic as foundational to understanding what it means to be a follower of Christ and what it means to be his church, his Body on earth.

So think for a minute...if I asked you what Jesus taught, what would you say? Turn to your neighbor for a minute and talk about this (and if you are a regular here, your job is to look around and make sure no one is alone, that everyone has someone to talk to, even if that means you have to pick up your stuff and move by them).

What did you come up with?

This is the big question, isn't it? If we follow Jesus, then how are we to live? Asking this question is a big deal. In Matthew 28:18-20, Jesus tells his early followers this:

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Do you hear that? "...teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." Jesus has called us to really look at what he taught. We are not to take anyone's word for it, but to try it, to test it, to see for ourselves.

I want to live my life in the fullest way. I want to live in relationship and community with others in authentic and life-changing ways. I want to make choices that, while not always being the easiest, enable me to live into who I truly am at the deepest level.

If this faith doesn't do that, if following what Jesus said wasn't the best possible way, then why bother? If church is just a week-after-week talk about being good and staying out of trouble, who needs it? Not I.

Wouldn't it be amazing if people looked at the church and said, "Wow! Now those are people who know how to live!" Do they say that now? Do people say, "Those Christians really know how to live life"? Sometimes, but not enough. And why is that? I think because sometimes we forget that Christianity is about living in a particular way.

The first followers of Jesus were not called Christians; they were called 'followers of the way'. To follow Jesus meant you engaged with his life-giving teachings on a regular basis. This is still true, although too many of us think Christianity is only about believing certain things, and that how we live is secondary. I am not talking about superficial morality, such as how one dresses or whether one has a tattoo or purple hair; instead, I am talking about attitude of the heart.

So Sunday each week will just be the start of understanding Jesus' teachings, because in order for you really to get it, you will need to try it out Monday thru Saturday and see if it is, in fact, the best way to live.

Now this doesn't mean that it will be the easiest way to live. Let's be clear about that! It won't be the easiest, and in our culture, where we want things immediately, it may even be a real struggle to understand that living into Jesus' teachings takes both time and energy. But if you will journey with me, committing to be here on Sunday and to listen to Jesus' words to us, and then in your own way applying what you learn the rest of the week, I can tell you that you will be changed.

So, let's begin. Today we are going to lay some foundation for the series by looking at how it is Jesus' intention that we should follow him because of what he can show us about how to live. We are also going to look at one key teaching of Jesus.

John 10:10 goes like this:

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. (New Revised Standard)

A thief is only there to steal and kill and destroy. I came so they can have real and eternal life, more and better life than they ever dreamed of. (The Message)

We need help dreaming of the life to which we are called. In this scene from "28 Days", Gwen (Sandra Bullock) and her counselor (Steve Buscemi) struggle with her addictions.

CLIP: 0:27:36 to :0:30:55. 3 minutes

A better life is open to us all, regardless of our age, race or background. Like we say, it doesn't matter who you are or where you have been — you are welcomed.

It is our desire as a faith community to invite people in because we understand that too many people out there are living lives that are so far from life abundant. So many people are broken, without hope, struggling to get through each day. And we know that because that was we, before God found us.

And when we talk about the abundant life, I don't mean abundant as in possessions. I mean abundant as in a joyful, peaceful, meaningful, satisfying, overflowing life.

Jesus' desire is for each of us to live a life that is "more and better than we ever dreamed of." But note this is not a pep talk or a self-help group. We are a church that follows Jesus and we seek, through living a life of faith, to embrace this abundant life that is found in him.

OK, I hope I have made my case as to why Jesus' teachings enable us to live the abundant life. Let's look at our first teaching. In teaching us how to live, it may go without saying that we live in the *here and now*. What I mean by that is that you and I can only make choices in the moment we are in—we cannot go back in time and change things, nor can we change the future. Here and now is all we have, and it is in this here and now that we learn how to live.

So, let's start with Jesus' words and the first teaching about which we are going to talk. These are the words of Jesus from Matthew 6:25-34:

"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. "So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today..."

This is obviously a teaching about not worrying, but there is something more for us to see. What I want to lift up is Jesus' call to us in the text to live in today.

This is hard. You and I spend a lot of time living in the past and living in the future. Whether it is a past mistake you mourn or a future fear you have, many of us don't live in the here and now.

In my life, I have been on a real journey to live in the now. I struggle almost daily, and I find myself constantly needing to make this a priority for it to happen in my life.

How it is for me is, I can be with my family—out to dinner, at a friend's house, at the movies—and while my body is physically present, my mind is elsewhere. I am thinking about what I didn't get to, or an idea of something I'd like to do, or a situation or person I am concerned about. My family of course knows, and they make allowances, but they shouldn't have to. I should be able to be in the now, instead of living in the past or the future.

Do you do this too? Is your body present but your mind a million miles away?

I got to a point a couple of years ago when I thought, *I don't want to live like this one more day*. Do you know what I mean? I don't want to wake up and see that Jacob is all grown up and I missed it, or that my friends have gone on to people who return calls and I am alone, or to come back from vacation with more lists of what to do and wonder where that vacation went.

How often are we in the here and now? Are you even here, now? Let's try something. I want you to close your eyes and breathe in slowly and out slowly for a minute. I will let you know when time is up. You just have to breathe.

(Pause)

How was that? Did you come into your experience, or were you so scattered that you had trouble being present?

This may be news to you, but Christianity is an eastern religion. It teaches mindfulness, or being present in the moment. Jesus' teaching first calls us to get back into our bodies and live in the here and now. But that is hard.

Cell Phone Fun

I love that sound, don't you? Relaxing, healing, peaceful... Technology is great, but why does it sometimes seem that, the more ways there are to get in touch with each other, the more lonely and isolated we become?

What does it mean to be available all of the time? To have the boundaries of work and home blurred? Always to be busy with something (and often more than one thing at a time)? Do we ever get to be in the here and now? Can we ever just let it ring?

A couple of weeks ago, I was at the National Pastors Convention in San Diego. I had a great time, and I learned a lot of things. I try to go every year, and I find that it is really a convention for troublemaking pastors, so I fit right in. But the best part was the conversations.

Several of my friends were there, and we just had a lot of time to sit and talk. We got to give each other the time and attention we needed. We got to the place where we were past the catching up with each other and instead could share our deepest thoughts and most precious and holy experiences. They were the kind of conversations that you long for, ones where it seems like there is all the time in the world, and all the space to speak and to listen.

Now what if we were in the middle of that and my cell phone rang. Immediately my friends would wonder, *Is she going to answer that?*

Have you ever had that happen to you? Doesn't it make you wonder where you are on the "friend scale"? You know, if you take a call while we are talking, I could think, *Whoever that is matters more...* And then, what are you to do while they talk on the phone? Where are you to look? Should you get up and leave or should they?

There has to be that time, that space to be present. Jesus was so about that. As you read the scriptures, you will see story after story about Jesus eating with all kinds of people, taking the time for lives to be shared and healed and stories to be woven together. This is the life for which we were created — to be present here and now and to know and love each other today, not tomorrow when things slow down.

I read a book recently in which the author spoke of adopting the spiritual discipline of noticing when she transitioned from one activity to another. So if she was working and then moved to going to lunch, she paused and noticed the end of one thing and the start of a new thing. If she were reading and moved to making phone calls, she would notice she ended one thing before she began another. This seems fairly simple.

But you know, it isn't, at least not for many of us who move from one thing to another to another to another. Practicing this simple exercise of noticing your movement from one task to another, while small, awakens you to being in the now. Try it this week.

Next week, we are going to talk about one of Jesus' teachings that today's teaching on *being here and now* leads into. But I want to end by asking you a couple of questions and inviting you to write about this during

- 9AM prayer time.
- 10:40 Kim to play 2-3 minutes of special music before prayer hymn

Just answers these for yourself. They are on an insert in your bulletin.

1. What does it mean for you to be fully present? What stops you?
2. To whom aren't you fully present?
3. What needs to go in your life so you can live out this teaching?

Let's have a moment of silence to reflect and I will close us in prayer...

Let us pray:

God of Presence, you call us to live in this day, in this hour, in this moment, in this minute.

Center us on this holy and precious now.

Focus us on the day at hand—its challenges and its joys.

Show us how to live fully.

Here and now is what you have given us. Let us then embrace it fully, joyfully, generously, abundantly, overflowing.

Let nothing stop us from experiencing this now.

Let nothing distract us, or convince us that there is anything more important than now.

Last week Lord, we will be honest and say, we forgot that this mattered as we worried, and stressed and let the past and the future hold our attention, but this week, we are going to slow down and be. We are going to open our hearts and minds to your holy rhythms and ways. Show us how to live. We desperately need you to show us, for on our own, we cannot figure it out. Let us learn from you and from your Christ, Jesus.

We pray for...