

**The Reverend Marjo Anderson**

**C: Easter 4**

**Acts 9:36-43, Psalm 23, Revelation 7:9-17, John 10:22-30**

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**“There’s life and then there’s LIFE”**

I don’t know for whom I feel sorrier – the Pharisees or Jesus!  
I feel sorry for the Pharisees because they just don’t get it. How sad for them!  
And I feel sorry for Jesus because no matter what he says or does,  
he can’t get them to understand. How frustrating for him!

The Pharisees remind me of a story Eckart Tolle tells  
of a beggar sitting on a box at the side of the road.  
As a man passes by, the beggar reaches out his upturned cap and says, “Have any change?”  
The man says, “No. I’m sorry. I don’t. What’s that you’re sitting on?”  
“Just an old box.”  
“Have you been sitting on it long?”  
“As long as I can remember.”  
“Ever have a look inside?”  
“Why would I look inside? It’s just an old box.”  
“Have a look inside,” the man urges.  
The man gets up from the box, kneels beside it, pries open the lid,  
and to his amazement, discovers that the box is filled with treasure.  
All of those years when he was homeless, with only the shabby clothes on his back,  
and barely enough to eat, he had sat on that box.  
And all the time there had been a treasure inside.

That’s how it was with the Pharisees.  
They possessed the secret to life, God’s Word, the Law and the Prophets,  
but to them it was simply the box they sat on or stood on.  
They held their box in the highest esteem, cherishing it and even worshipping it,  
but although they had material comforts,  
their souls were as homeless and shabby and hungry as the beggar’s,  
because they were oblivious to the treasure inside that could change their lives.  
Jesus kept trying to explain to them what it was they had  
and to get them to look at the treasure inside their box,  
but no matter what words Jesus used, they were not understood as he intended.

It’s not an unusual problem,  
for we all know the frustration of trying but failing to communicate.  
It happens because we are trying to convey an idea from our mind to someone else’s  
and to do that we must use words,  
and words are not the ideas themselves, but simply boxes that contain them.  
And often we hear the word, we see the container, and we assume we know what is inside.

We assume we know what the speaker means. But very often we don't. We get it wrong. It's even more challenging when we translate from one language to another.

Take the psalm we read today, for instance: "The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want." The part that is translated "I shall not want" does not really mean that.

It was translated that way because of what follows.

In other words, if God provides green pastures and still waters and the restoring of one's soul, and protection and comfort and ultimate victory and goodness and mercy, then what else could one want?

But a more accurate translation would be: "The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not be peeled off."

Or in other words, "I am clinging to my Shepherd like white on rice, like I'm super-glued to him, like I'm one with him.

And it's that being attached, connected, one with God that provides all I need.

It's not like I am separate from God and that God supplies my needs by reaching out, picking up some gifts, and placing them in my hands, but rather that I am connected with God in whom those gifts reside.

And that is in essence what Jesus was talking about when he said he had come to give people eternal life.

But there again, there's a communication problem – and not only between Jesus and the Pharisees, but perhaps between Jesus and us.

I mean, when we hear the word "life", what do we hear? What ideas come to mind?

Probably we think about our biological, physical, material life, about birth and death and what lies between, about our heart beating and our lungs breathing, about seeing and hearing and touching and tasting and smelling, about waking up in the morning and going to bed at night and all that happens in between, about thinking and doing, about walking and talking, about family and friends.

That is not what Jesus means when he uses the word "life", however.

You see, there are 3 words in the New Testament that refer to different things, but they are all translated into English with the single word "life".

In Greek there's the word "bios" which refers to our physical, biological life,

& there's the word "Psuche" which refers to our intellectual, emotional, psychological life.

But Jesus did not come to give us these.

What Jesus came to give us is "Zoe" which is a totally spiritual thing.

To understand Zoe we must first understand that we are more than physical beings and more than psychological beings.

We are spiritual beings.

In a sense that means that our physical, material bodies are containers, too, mere boxes that contain a great treasure.

And yet even our physical bodies may not be as physical as we think.  
We may look like solid physical objects but in actual fact that's an illusion.  
We are not solid,

because each one of the millions and millions of atoms which make up our body  
is 99% empty space.

And within each one of those atoms there's a small nucleus  
and even tinier electrons that are in constant motion around the nucleus.

And what causes that motion is energy.

We may look like solid flesh but we are actually an energy field,  
and it's that energy field that is our spiritual self,

which because of the movement of the electrons gives the illusion of a solid physical self.

And what is true about our bodies is true about everything else in the universe.

We exist not only in a physical material realm that is bound by time and space  
but on a deeper level we exist in a spiritual realm,  
and it is in that spiritual realm that we connect with God who is Spirit.

So when Jesus says he came to give us Zoe, life,

he's talking about something deeper, and richer, and more powerful  
than the Pharisees could grasp,

And when Jesus said he came to give Eternal life,

they didn't understand what eternal meant either, just as many today don't.

I mean, what do we think of when we think of eternity?

We think of something that goes on and on and on and on forever, ad infinitum, right?

In other words we think about eternity

as starting now and proceeding into the future and never stopping.

But eternity does not mean the unlimited extension of time, for in eternity there is no time.

As soon as we leave this physical material world that is bound by space and time,  
there is no more past and there is no more future for there is no more time.

Eternity is simply the eternal now, the present moment.

And so when we are entirely present in the present, we are in God's presence  
and it is in that moment that we experience eternal, abundant life.

We don't have to wait until we die to experience eternal life;

we can experience it now in this life

whenever we put aside our ego and our will

and cling so tightly to God that we cannot be peeled off.

Jesus spoke to everyone – to the scribes & Pharisees, as well as to the tax collectors & sinners.

He spoke to those who were a part of the religious establishment and to those who weren't.

He spoke to those who were active leaders and participants in the temple

and to those who rarely or perhaps never attended.

Jesus' message to everyone was that there was more to life than they knew.

He saw them as beggars sitting on their boxes, not realizing that there was treasure inside.

There is so much more to life than what we can see and hear in touch and taste and feel.

There is so much more to life than the thoughts we think and the actions we take.

There is so much more to life than the ordinary every day routines and rituals.

There is so much more to life than our past and our future.

There is so much more to life than money or fame or power.

Those things are just Bios or Psuche,

but what Jesus offers is Zoe, or life with a capital L, the vibrant life of the Spirit that comes from being so attached to God that we can't be snatched away and so connected that everything we could possibly want flows from God's spirit directly into ours.

We can be like the Pharisees, attached to our rituals, our beliefs, and our comfort zone.

We can be like the Pharisees, believing that what we believe and the way we worship is right and we have nothing to learn from those who are different or those whom we see as inferior.

We can be like the Pharisees, ready to grumble and complain, ready to judge others, ready to tell them the right way to worship and the right way to live.

We can be like the Pharisees who couldn't hear or understand what Jesus was saying.

We can be like the Pharisees, content to sit on our familiar, comfortable box, and never dare to look inside.

We can be like the Pharisees, or we can be like those who followed Jesus.

And to be like those who followed Jesus, we must do what they did –

let go of our own will and desires

and open our minds and hearts and bodies and souls to God's will.

Jesus came to tell us to get off of the boxes we have sat on all our lives and to look inside.

Jesus came so that we could have more than a mere physical and psychological existence

but life in the spirit, life with a capital L, abundant life, eternal life NOW,

a life of praise and prayer,

a life overflowing with peace and patience and faith and hope and love and joy.

Jesus the Good Shepherd invites you to cling to him so tightly that you cannot be peeled off.

The Good Shepherd, our Heavenly Father,

stands today with arms wide open, just waiting for you to run into them.

And when you run into God's arms you will find in them

more than any physical or material or psychological or emotional gift;

you will find something that satisfies the desire underneath every other desire –

the desire that only God can fill.

When you run into God's arms you will find all those things the psalmist names –

green pastures, still waters, restoration of your soul, right pathways, comfort and protection, vindication, victory, joy, goodness, mercy – all the good things your heart desires.

But you will find more than all those things – you'll find something far more precious –

you will find a treasure deep inside: a relationship, an attachment, a connection with God.

You will find that when you are in the arms of God, that's all that really matters. Amen