

SERMON 828

Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany

February 9, 2014

932nd Week as Priest

758th Week at St Dunstan's

23rd Week at Epiphany-Tallassee

ABUNDANT LIFE

Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Abundant Life

My mother, Carolyn Glass Warren, turned 93 last week. Rosemary Dusi celebrated her 97th birthday at Holy Eucharist (Rite One, of course) also on Wednesday. And Stella Warren (my new granddaughter) turned one year old with a party to mark her new and abundant life. I was at Camp McDowell on Friday and Saturday with 35 college students and young adults (including Adrian Borden), so I missed that party, but I was party to another celebration of life in Christ with those young people at Vocare.

Today, we celebrate a new life in Christ with the Holy Baptism of Elizabeth Adalin Kerr. Life is good, and God is very gracious.

"You are the salt of the earth," said Jesus. That is to say, "Your life is of infinite importance to me. And what you do with it is important to me. And I take seriously what you do with your "one wild and precious life."

"You are the light of the world," said our Lord, which is to say, you are my beloved, and you belong to me and me alone. You live no longer for yourself, but also for me--and in me, and with me, and through me. I have work for you to do, and a purpose--to shine my light in the dark places and to be an influence for good, for peace and joy and hope and reconciliation. Not just an hour or two a week but basically 24/7. All I want, says Jesus of Nazareth, is a complete unqualified commitment. That's all.

Martin Heidegger, a German theologian of the 20th Century, spoke of *authentic existence* as the measure of a person's life. Most people, he said, are guided by in the influence of culture, a life of "quiet conformity." But the person whose life is guided by the light of Christ is one who will discover their authentic existence. If, in him, you live and move and have your being, then you will discover Abundant Life.

You are salt and light, real and genuine, various and sundry, unique and essential. Your life, and the lives of your family and friends, of newcomers and of strangers, all are of infinite importance to God.

Imagine that abundant life is an amalgam of difference, particularity, and passion.

Imagine life as a celebration, an intricate dance, a journey.

Abundant life in Christ, and with Christ, and through Christ is like coming home, like being welcomed into the household of God as a

beloved child, like returning to the place where first you found meaning, purpose, and true delight.

Consider that abundant life is being washed clean with living water and held, warm and safe, in the loving arms of your mother, in the strong embrace of your father.

And abundant life is more, even more. It is life lived, played out, in relationship, in meaningful and healthy patterns of being, becoming, growing. It is life lived in the context of neighborhood, and the fabric of community.

Abundant life is here and present and available for us all-- from the newest child being baptized to the eldest among us. It is the congregation, the faithful gathered, the all in all of us.

And even more. Abundant life is the discovery of self--from dependence as a helpless child, to independence as a young adult, to the interdependence of life lived out in relationships that are both healthy and life-giving.

Abundant life is the discovery of your passion, your calling, your purposes--for they can be many and varied--and they can be subject to change, to the influence of the holy, to the gentle nudging of the Spirit.

My favorite of poets, Gerard Manley Hopkins, and my favorite of his poems, this one, give insight into the nature and being of abundant life—

Allow me to provide a bit of context. A kingfisher is a bird whose bright wings flash red when it dives for a fish over a body of water. Dragonflies seem to catch light in their beating wings. The other images are of the particularity, the uniqueness of all the aspects of the created order of things. But the main message of the poem is that each thing, each person, has a purpose under heaven—and that in so doing, that person becomes authentic, genuine, and just.

AS KINGFISHERS CATCH FIRE, by Gerard Manley Hopkins, an English poet and priest of the 19th Century ...

As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame;
As tumbled over rim in roundy wells
Stones ring; like each tucked string tells, each hung bell's
Bow swung finds tongue to fling out broad its name;
Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:
Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;
Selves - goes itself; myself it speaks and spells,
Crying What I do is me: for that I came.

Í say móre: the just man justices;
Kéeps grace: thát keeps all his goings graces;
Acts in God's eye what in God's eye he is -
Chríst - for Christ plays in ten thousand places,
Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his
To the Father through the features of men's faces.

Almighty God has blessed us all, and God bless Elizabeth with
Abundant Life. **AMEN.**

-920 words