

The Reverend Jon Hauerwas - Visible - March 22, 2020
Psalm 23 and Ephesians 5:8-11, 13-24

The Christian season of Lent has long been associated with simplicity. And yet this Lent feels different - very different - as many of us are now faced with the kinds of restrictions that once seemed unthinkable. We are living through unprecedented times in which the personal and economic impacts of COVID-19 continue to astound.

We know the reality in our communities. Social interactions are limited. Millions of people are confined to their homes. Vacation, travel, and family gatherings have been placed on hold. Especially, our hearts go out to those living in care facilities who are presently unable to see their loved ones face to face. We pray for those who have lost their jobs, for all who are ill, and for those whose loved ones have succumbed to the illness.

Yet even in the midst of the current changes and challenges, God's work continues. We recognize the opportunity to pray with renewed enthusiasm and to assist those who are suffering. To this end, we encourage you to reach out to your friends and neighbors with a listening ear and with words of encouragement.

Just as importantly, now is the time for deeper reflection as we consider incorporating some of the present changes as part of a more faithful journey. Let me tell you what I mean. Recently I reviewed an anthology as a part of my doctoral work entitled *Simpler Living, Compassionate Life: A Christian Perspective*. The essays found there contrast the relentless pursuit of the so-called good life with the abundant life made possible in Jesus Christ.

In essence, the authors challenge us to consider the status quo and to recognize life's many idols, both obvious and hidden. Its pages well describe the society we inhabited just a few short weeks ago. A society in which Americans are overwhelmed with stress, rushing and restless, so addicted to stimulation and adrenaline that "half of the population now says they have too little time for their families."¹ Significantly, "two-earner couples have less time together," even as researchers note that more time together is essential for marital happiness and satisfaction.²

While capitalism has provided many opportunities, including "a dramatically increased standard of living," it has come "at the cost of a much more demanding

¹ Schut, Michael, and Bill McKibben. *Simpler Living, Compassionate Life: A Christian Perspective*. Church Publishing, 2009. Pages 34-36, 39-40, 47.

² Schut, 35.

work life.”³ Americans are sleeping less and consuming more.⁴ In our haste, “we are more likely to consume because we are ignoring the little voice asking us if we really need this new thing.”⁵ We have adopted the idea that “more is always better.”⁶ Never satisfied with what we have, we are people of endless desires, even as the joy we feel following a new purchase quickly fades away.⁷

Just as concerning, we rarely appreciate time on its own terms. By regarding time as money, our attention is constantly diverted and scattered.⁸ We live with the constant anxiety of time scarcity coupled with the nagging belief “that whatever we do or say makes no real difference.”⁹ We’ve bought into the illusion of the so-called good life, which promises never-ending acquisition, the eradication of all emptiness, and lifelong happiness.¹⁰ And yet, affluence has not made us less anxious or depressed. Clearly, the idols that we love have promised something that they cannot finally deliver.¹¹

³ Schut, 34.

⁴ Schut, 35, 59.

⁵ Schut, 40.

⁶ Schut, 40.

⁷ Schut, 40, 144.

⁸ Schut, 38-39.

⁹ Schut, 38, 54.

¹⁰ Schut, 25, 39, 45.

¹¹ Schut, 25.

Friends, Jesus never promised us the good life. Instead, his promise is for abundant life. So what's the difference? And what does that really mean? Abundant life is associated with mindfulness, with living in the present, and with viewing time as a sacred gift. ¹² Abundant life means embracing our emptiness, our incompleteness, and radical yearning for love. ¹³ Abundant life means slowing down, appreciating time, and expressing gratitude. ¹⁴

Abundant life calls us to be fully present, to take the time to listen to others, and to make room for silence, meditation, reflection, and prayer. ¹⁵ Abundant life means living a life of voluntary simplicity and consuming only what we need. ¹⁶ Abundant life values one's responsibility to the community, identifies with the marginalized, and is embodied as justice. ¹⁷ Rather than perpetual happiness, the abundant life promises deep joy. ¹⁸ The abundant life practices Sabbath rest. ¹⁹

With all of this in mind, I invite you to hear again the words of Psalm 23:

- 1 The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.
- 2 He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters;
- 3 he restores my soul.

¹² Schut, 11, 13, 38.

¹³ Schut, 47.

¹⁴ Schut, 27, 39-40.

¹⁵ Schut, 49, 51, 152.

¹⁶ Schut, 10, 59.

¹⁷ Schut, 30, 60, 137.

¹⁸ Schut, 25.

¹⁹ Schut, 177.

- He leads me in right paths
for his name's sake.
- 4 Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
I fear no evil;
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff —
they comfort me.
- 5 You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.
- 6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD
my whole life long.

Today, I count myself among the exceedingly fortunate. I do not worry about waking up tomorrow to a pink slip. My home is safe and comfortable. It more than meets my needs. And I have a wife and children at my side, whom I love dearly, ensuring that I will not experience the kind of intense loneliness that so many will endure in the days and weeks ahead.

And yet, despite my relative comfort, I am called to live a more meaningful existence. A more perfect way. During these times of uncertainty, may you not become disillusioned, but rather, step forth into the light. For the light shines in the darkness and the darkness shall never overcome it. Thanks be to God for this abundant life in Christ. Amen.