



4th Sunday in Easter

26th April 2026

Sunday of the Good Shepherd

The Reality of Living Christ's Abundant Life

A few years ago, I was in a crowded shopping centre when I noticed a little girl who had wandered just a few steps away from her mum. Not far—but far enough that she could no longer see her. And then, you could see the moment it hit her, her face changed. That sudden flicker of panic—*where is my mummy?* The noise of the crowd seemed to close in. Everything felt overwhelming. The little girl drew in a breath, and was just on the edge of crying out—when, through the noise, a voice called her name.

“It’s Mummy!” You could see the relief on her face. She didn’t pause. She didn’t look around. She simply turned—and ran straight toward that voice. She knew that voice. But from the moment of hearing her mother’s voice everything changed. The crowd was still there. Nothing else had shifted. But she had heard the voice of the one who knew her—the voice of the one she trusted.

I think that moment gives us a window into what Jesus is talking about in John chapter 10. When he says, “My sheep hear my voice... I know them... and they follow me.” (John 10:3-4) And then just a few lines later: “I have come that they may have life... and have it to the full.” (John 10:10)

So what does that ‘full life’ or ‘abundant life’ actually look like in reality? If we’re honest, when we hear “a full life” or “an abundant life,” we tend to imagine something like comfort, stability, things going well—a picture of enjoying a cup of coffee while watching the sunrise emerges - a sense that life is working. And yet, that’s not the reality of everyday, is it?

Life can feel full—but full of pressure. Full of demands. Full of pain. Full of uncertainty. So, the challenge is—we often misunderstand what Jesus meant. Everyone here knows that life in this world is never described as ‘easy’. So, Jesus had to be talking about something deeper than an easy, comfortable life. Thankfully, Jesus shows us exactly what this abundant life looks like.

Point 1 | At the centre of the abundant life Jesus came to give us is a relationship with Him.

At the centre of this ‘full’ or ‘abundant life’ is a relationship. “His sheep hear his voice... he calls his own sheep by name... and they follow him because they know his voice.” (John 10:3) Notice the dynamics: The relationship is not distant. It’s not abstract. It’s not vague.

This 'full life' is about being known—and learning to recognise the voice of Jesus in the middle of everyday life, with all its mess and noise. And that begins to reshape how we understand what a 'full life' actually is. In reality, living life to the full is not about having everything sorted; nor is it about everything falling in place at the right time.

It is about being deeply known, attentively led, and steadily being formed through an intimate relationship with Jesus. Have we moved in our faith from saying, 'Yes, I believe in the reality of Jesus', to 'Yes, I have a relationship with Jesus?'

Point 2 | An abundant life with Jesus begins with being known by Him, being secure in him, and being personally led by Him.

First, this 'abundant life' begins with being known by Jesus, being secure in Jesus, and being personally led by Jesus. In verse 3, Jesus says, "He calls his own sheep by name." That's personal. That's intimate. And this is echoed in Psalm 23: "The Lord is my shepherd... he leads me..." (Psalm 23:2)

The more I reflected on how to translate the relationship between a shepherd and his sheep into our modern world, the closest parallel I could find was that of a parent and a baby. Babies are deeply dependent on their parents—for protection, for sustenance, for provision, for guidance, for love and care. And in all our readings, the relationship being described is not distant or abstract, and it's certainly not merely religious—it is deeply personal, where one is totally reliant on the other. It's a relationship lived out in an everyday, moment-by-moment way.

And here's something important that Jesus highlighted: the sheep in Jesus' flock aren't sent off on their way with a set of instructions to follow. Rather, they follow a voice they recognise. As we grow older, we tend to prefer having a detailed map for our life—a plan we can follow independently. Once we have it – even if we make it up ourselves – we'll check it when we're unsure, or when assurance is needed that we're heading in the right direction. And when things are going well, we tuck our plan away, comforted by the fact that it's there if we need it.

But the dynamics of the life Jesus offers are very different. Jesus didn't give us a map, nor a 12-step plan for our lives. Rather, He offers us Himself—His voice, His presence, His regular daily guidance. And over time, by staying close to Jesus, we learn to recognise His voice—not because it's the loudest, but because it becomes the most familiar and the most trustworthy.

So, perhaps we could ask ourselves, 'Are we making space to listen to Jesus' voice, so that it becomes the most familiar and trustworthy voice in our lives?'

Point 3 | The abundant life Jesus offers is a growing, nourished life.

Second, in reality, the kind of abundant life Jesus offers is a growing, nourished life. In Peter's first letter, he uses the analogy I referred to earlier. That we are like newborn babies in a relationship that is totally reliant on our heavenly Father. We're told to "crave pure spiritual milk... so that by it you may grow." (1 Peter 2:2) Spiritual growth isn't instant—it unfolds like the growth of a baby into a child.

Someone asked me recently if I'd seen my two-month-old granddaughter, and I thought, 'I wonder how much she's grown?' But I wouldn't expect her to look like a 5-year-old in the next photo. Because growth is not something you notice day by day. And that's the reality of our

spiritual growth—it's slow, deep and transformational. It involves letting go of things that diminish life—malice, deceit, envy—and allowing God to shape something new in us.

But an abundant spiritual life does involve being regularly nourished by the spiritual milk of God's word. What would happen to a newborn if they couldn't receive nourishing milk? They simply wouldn't survive—and in many ways, we're no different.

So, what priority are we giving to receiving and digesting God's word so that we can grow into maturity in our faith?

Point 4 | The abundant life Jesus offers gives us a secure identity as one of Christ's own.

Third, in reality, the abundant life Jesus offers gives us a secure identity. We read in 1 Peter, "You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood..." (1 Peter 2:9) In a world that is always shaping our identity and telling us what we must do or must have to measure up, the reality of Jesus' 'abundant life' is that we find our identity anchored in who God says we are.

In contrast with the world, being one of Jesus' sheep is not based on our performance. Nor does Jesus compare one sheep with another. He doesn't expect us to be any different from who he made us to be. Our identity is grounded in being known and called by God.

Hear the whisper of the Spirit, 'You are chosen. You are God's own possession. You are His treasured child.' Isn't that nourishing?

Point 5 | The abundant life Jesus offers is a shared life.

Finally, in reality, Jesus offers all his sheep a shared life in community. We see this in Acts 2, people living this abundant life together—devoted to teaching, fellowship, breaking bread and prayer. There is generosity. There is joy. There is a strong connection.

The reality is—we can't experience Jesus' full life alone. The Christian life was never designed to be individualistic. That's why we're called a family.

Finally, Jesus gives us a warning, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy." (John 10: 10) Not every voice we'll hear in this world leads to life, nor will it nourish our hearts. Some voices promise fulfilment—but leave us empty. Some promise freedom—but lead to pressure or anxiety. So part of living this 'full life' is learning to recognise which voice we are listening to, and which we should reject.

Coming back to that child in the shopping centre. What made the difference wasn't that everything around them suddenly changed. It was that they heard—and trusted—the right voice. And that is the reality of living Christ's abundant life to the full.

So perhaps the question for us is simply this: What voice am I listening to most right now?

And how might I make a little more space this week, to hear the voice of the one who knows me—and calls me by name?

Because living Christ's abundant life isn't found in escaping reality. It's found in walking through it hand-in-hand with Jesus.

Closing Prayer

Gracious Lord,

Thank you for not being distant from us, but for knowing us, calling us by name, and leading us. In the noise and busyness of our lives, help us to recognise your voice more clearly. Give us hearts that are attentive, and spirits that are willing to follow where you lead.

Where we feel overwhelmed, bring your peace. Where we feel uncertain, bring your guidance. Where we feel empty, fill us with your life.

Teach us what it truly means to live life to the full—not by escaping reality, but by walking through it with you. We ask this in Jesus' name, Amen.

Personal Reflection Questions

1. What voices are most shaping my thinking and decisions at the moment?
2. When have I recently sensed or recognised the voice of Jesus in my life?
3. Where might Jesus be inviting me to trust and follow Him more closely right now?
4. What is one way I can make space this week to listen for Jesus' voice?
5. How might living "life to the full" look different in my current circumstances?