

Abundantly Loved! Abundantly Living?

25 April 20-21

John 10:11-18 and I John 3:16-24

One day Christ came calling. He came to call people into **life!** Not **just** life as **usual**. No, life in **abundance!** That's what he **said**. Life in abundance! So, what **is** life in abundance? Well – **maybe** we could get at that question by asking: What is it NOT? Surely, living **un-loved** is **not abundant** living... as anyone who **feels** unloved would tell you. And **neither** is living **un-loving** – living without love for anyone or anything beyond oneself. No, I believe that life generally **becomes abundant life** for us **when** we know that we **are** loved... and **then** start loving something or someone else. **When** those **two** things **converge**, something gets sparked... and *life as usual* is left behind!

There's a really **touching** short story about a young married couple whose love for each other was tested and found true. O. Henry was the author, and he **called** his story The Gift of the Magi.

During the Great **Depression**, Jim and Della Young lived in a modest, barely furnished apartment. Before the stock market crash in '29, Jim's salary and **prospects** had been **sky high**; but when the market imploded, his wages were cut; and then it took **everything** they had simply to survive. Everything... although, O. Henry wrote... *there were two **possessions** of the James Dillingham Youngs in which they both took a mighty pride. One was Jim's gold watch that had been his father's and his grandfather's. The other was Della's hair. Had the queen of Sheba lived in the flat across the **airshaft**, Della would have let her hair hang out the window to dry someday **just to depreciate** Her Majesty's jewels and gifts. Had King **Solomon** been the janitor, with all his treasures piled up in the basement, Jim would have pulled out his watch every time he passed, **just to see the King pluck at his beard** from envy.*

As Christmas neared, and with **no** money to pay for any **presents**, Della and Jim **both** wrestled with how they would express the deep love they felt for each other. **Della** determined to buy a platinum **watch chain** for her beloved; and one day she cut and sold her hair in order to gain the money that it cost. On that **same** day, **Jim** found a set of gorgeous tortoise shell **combs** for Della; and to pay for **them** he **sold** his watch and then headed home with his gift in his pocket. You can **imagine** the scene when they **met** each other that day. Although each was **startled** to learn

what the other had done, both were **moved** profoundly by the deep and sacrificial love their spouse had shown.

So, now, what about you? Have **you** been **loved** in a manner **like** that? If so, what does that **sort** of love look like? Sacrificial? Surely, if someone has **sacrificed** something **valuable** for you, **then** you **know** that you are loved, right? *By this*, John tells us, *we know love – that Christ laid down his life for us*. For us... for each **one** of us... as if he or she were the only one... for us, Christ gave up **his life!**

Friends – **that** is love. **You** are deeply, profoundly and personally loved by God! You are **loved!** And if you **know** that, then I'd say that you are at least **part** way to **living** abundantly! I **say part way** because I think that for living to be **truly** abundant, one must not only have a sense of **being** loved... one must **practice** a self-giving love for some other.

You are loved. But, are you also **loving**? You **receive** God's love. But do you offer love yourself? A few years ago I was told about a **mythical** beast. I picture it looking something like a dragon. On one end of it was its **head**. And on the **other** end, where you might expect to find a **tail**, there was... **another** head. So, you see, this **beast** had no... tail area. So, the beast could **eat**. And it was darn good at that – it could take **in** the chow. It could **load up** at the Golden Corral. But it could not... shall we say... unload. And **because** of that, its **life** was not particularly... happy... in balance.

So it is with those who **are** loved... but who **then** do **not** love in **turn**. I **suppose** that someone in **that** state might feel a **certain** *fullness*... but not likely much *fulfill-ment*... and certainly **not** the abundant life that **Christ** came to draw us into.

Little children, the Elder John wrote, *let's not just talk about love; let's **practice** love... **real** love... which, as Christ and O. Henry have shown us, is self-giving... sacrificial... self-**emptying**... and **yet**, at the **same** time, rather fulfilling.*

Now, God knows, you have all kinds of opportunities to **practice** such love in your life and ministry **here at Bon Air Church**... to extend yourself to benefit others... to put the **needs** of others **ahead** of your own:

To, for example, teach a church school class or a lead a Bible study, when you'd perhaps **rather** be one of the students;

To extend the grace of **forgiveness** to someone who has hurt you;

To call on a homebound member or drive someone to a doctor's appointment;

To use some of your vacation days to work on a big **improvement** project at the church or to lead a mission trip with some of the youth;
To answer a call from the congregation to serve as one of its Elders;
To mentor one of the younger members, or to be a spiritual friend for someone who is new to faith;
To set aside some of your **personal** dreams for Bon Air Church so the congregation can pursue the dreams God has for it;
To make personal visits to some of the neighbors, business owners, school principals and teachers in this community, to ask what their needs are and how they think this church might help address some of them... to listen to them **seriously**, and to let **what** they share inform the way you deploy your energies... and to whom you direct your ministries.

There are all **kinds** of opportunities we're presented with here to **practice** love... sacrificial love... to **be** loving in truth and action. Which one... or which ones... do you think our Lord might be hoping you will take on... so that **he** can do something good in this part of the world... **through** you... and **for** you?

You... you **all**... and every **one** of you... have been called to **life** – not **simply** life as **usual**, but abundant life. You're **being** called to enjoy that **quality** of life that rises and wraps itself wonderfully 'round us when we **receive** Christ's love and then **offer** his kind of self-giving, self-spending love to others. So, **when** you receive the love that Christ's pours out upon you **this** day, may you not fail to **honor** his self-giving through some loving ministry of your own. Receive, and then **give**... for God's good purposes. This world needs not even **one** more of those two-headed beasts! But it certainly could **use** some self-giving, rich-living disciples like **you**... to bless it in Christ's name.

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.