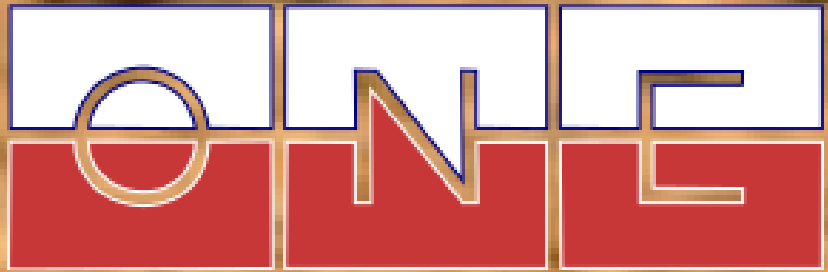


INSIDE:

+ Living life more abundantly



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Someday, I Know Our Kite Will Soar

Linn Ann Huntington

North Oak Community Church



It was just a kite.

My husband, Don, and I were shopping for Christmas gifts for his family when we saw it lying against the back wall of a store.

"Look, it has a bear on it," he said. At that time I collected all things bears. During our courtship, when I had told him that, he began lavishing me with "bear things" - greeting cards, small porcelain bears, teddy bears, even jewelry. The kite featured a large brown bear with a red heart, his hand waving a greeting, against a sky of rainbow colors.

"What would I do with a kite?" I said. "I've never even flown one."

"You've never flown a kite?" Don's face was incredulous as he looked up at me from his wheelchair.

I shrugged. "I guess my parents just weren't into kite

flying. I never learned to fly one."

"Well, we must change that," he said.

I shook my head. "The last thing I need is a kite. Look at this list of gifts. We're going to go over our budget as it is."

Guess what I got for my birthday in February?

The next month, on a slightly windy day, we set out for the field near our house. On certain days of the week the field was full of kids practicing or playing sports on the various ball fields, but today the field was empty. I walked, carrying the kite, with Don beside me in his power chair. He had had to use a wheelchair for several years. It never occurred to me to take his wheelchair-accessible van.

I'm not sure why I thought learning to fly a kite would be easy, but it wasn't. I ran, I leapt, I tried to follow all of Don's instructions. But I didn't have much luck. Then trouble

struck. We had strayed too far onto one of the ball diamonds. The wheels of Don's power chair got stuck in the sand.

This had happened once before, at a park in another town. The small wheels on a power chair just don't work in sand. I immediately dropped to my knees and began digging with my hands around the wheels. Don tried maneuvering the joystick, pushing it backwards and forwards, but the wheels only sank deeper into the sand. "Stop rocking the chair. You're going to fall out," I shouted above the wind, which had now picked up. "Just let me try to dig you out."

I scooped out the sand from around his tires, wishing we had brought the van. Surely there was a cup or something inside it that I could use as a better scoop. But the van was at home.

The more I tried scooping the sand away, the deeper the chair's wheels seemed to sink

Someday, I Know Our Kite Will Soar (Continued)

into the sand. I stood up and looked around. There was no one else in sight. "Please God, help us," I whispered.

I tried pushing the chair, but it was too big and too heavy for me to budge. I went back to digging in the sand. Suddenly the chair lurched forward out of the sand. By now, the clouds had started to darken, and the wind was cold. We turned toward home. I walked silently, clutching the kite.

We always said we would find a new location and try to fly it again. But we never did. I stuck the kite in the back of a closet.

Then, one day, Don asked about it. "Whatever happened to your kite?"

"I still have it," I said. "It's in the back closet."

"Maybe we should get it out."

So we did. With a friend's help, we mounted it on our bedroom wall. That's where Don wanted it. It became the last thing we saw every night and the first thing we saw every morning.

And life went on – the day Don's kidneys failed, and dialysis began eating up large chunks of our days. The day we were told he had advanced osteoporosis, and that his bones were at severe

risk of fracture. When they broke, they never healed. Don's activity level dropped as his pain level increased.

Along the way I learned that despite one's best efforts, many dreams in life go unfilled. That despite one's most fervent prayers, God's answers aren't always what we want. That the abundant life Jesus promised us can take many different forms. One night as we trundled down the hall toward bed, Don looked up at the kite. "Do you think we'll ever be able to fly it?"

"Maybe God will help us fly it in heaven," I said, trying to smile. "That way we can both run across a field and watch it soar."

He sighed. "I hope so. I think I've almost forgotten how to run."

My heart broke. In college he had played football, racing down the gridiron. But that was long ago.

Then one day he was gone. He took a nap and never woke up.

I remain. The kite still hangs on my bedroom wall. It is the last thing I see at night and the first thing I see each morning.

I recently read a devotional that spoke to my heart. In the January/February 2021 edition of "All God's Creatures," Devon O'Day wrote, "God, help me remember that just because someone has more does not mean I ever have less."

My life has been immensely blessed. Someday I know that our kite will soar.



Fifteen years later, the kite still hangs on the writer's wall.

The Abundant Life in Adversity

Pastor Sabian Chaney

New Life Center

Just as good is most clearly seen by us in the presence of great evil; just as character's truest expressions are found in the deepest valleys; the abundant life is revealed in adversity. It may seem that the abundant life (or life of blessing) is best seen when all of life is rosy and peaceful, but I do not believe that to be true.

The word "abundant" is found only a few times in scripture, all in a context of God's gracious blessings toward us. Biblically, abundance was never self-produced, but a gift from God given through relationship and dependence upon and with Him. Every reference I have found for abundance has been found in a context of people in trying situations.

The point is that Jesus' abundance is not a bonus to lives that are generally doing well by themselves, but a necessity for persevering in faith. God does bless us materially,

but His greatest, most enduring blessings, are eternal in nature.

The open secret to living in the fullness and abundance of Christ is the abiding presence of God.

"For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere." - Psalm 84:10

"Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine; you are the branches."
- John 15:4-5

Just as the survival of a tree's limbs depends on its connection with the tree, Jesus' blessings flow from our relationship with Him. Many are familiar with the minister's call to read our Bibles, pray, and meditate upon God. What is the point of those activities? To punch the clock and get our merit badge? No, a thousand times, no! Those disciplines are means to an end! The end of every spiritual discipline is to connect in a personal way to Jesus, to experience His active

presence within our lives.

It is true that the Biblical God is omnipresent (at all places at once), but His active presence is different. Have you ever been sitting next to a loved one, but in your heart, you were a million miles away? I know I have been there. We can be the same way with God. He is present, but our hearts are a million miles away. This is not God's desire for your relationship with Him.

I do not presume to know everyone's story. This, for many, has been a season of loss and trauma, and to read about the "abundant life" may feel a little bit insensitive. That is not the heart of this pastor. I've personally experienced great loss and heartache during this time, but in the midst of these dark times I've also experienced the great emotional and spiritual healing of the Holy Spirit. I have seen the best in humanity in some of its worst moments. I have seen great love in the midst of great hate.

The abundant life in

The Abundant Life in Adversity (Continued)

Christ can be had, but it is only found in the presence of Jesus, and it may look different than you imagine it looks. If you desire to find His goodness and His abundance, I want to encourage you to find Jesus' presence.

If the abundance of God has seemingly been found wanting in your life, I plead with you, do not stay in that place of disappointment emotionally and spiritually. Purpose in your heart to find the active presence of God within your life,

experience the healing of God's presence and abide in the life-giving and abundant "vine" of Christ. If you have questions concerning this, please feel free to contact me.

Stop Looking for the Beach

Reverend Shay Craig

St. Andrews Episcopal Church

St. Michael's Episcopal Church

Several years ago, I was on a bus travelling up to a vacation spot in the mountains. In the seat next to me were two children, a boy about 11 years old and his sister who was about 9. As the awe-inspiring vista opened before us - snow capped mountains and deep ravines nestled in fog - the little girl sighed and huffed in that particular way only a 9-year-old can do. Her brother said, "What's wrong?" She answered. "I wanted there to be sand. And an ocean. Like where we were last year, at the beach." I looked around at the mountain goats racing up the hillside as the sun broke over the ridge and

thought: Nope. No sand. No ocean. Her brother said, "That's because these are the mountains. Stop looking for the beach."

As we close in on a year of living with the construction of a pandemic, I am afraid it is very easy for us to become that 9-year-old girl. "I thought there would be a prom ... and a graduation ceremony."

"What about State Fair? And Oktoberfest?"

"I wanted to be with family for Easter, 4th of July, Thanksgiving, Christmas, birthdays, weddings, etc..."

Yes, we love and miss the special aspects of our lives. Yes, it feels strange to go without them. And yes, we will appreciate them more when we can do them

again.

But for now, in the words of a wise 11-year-old boy, "stop looking for the beach."

We are always living in God's abundance. The pandemic did not put a stop to it. After all, this is the God who gave us food from the sky when we were hungry, fed 5,000 people with a little bit of fish and bread, and transformed water into 900 bottles of wine at the wedding at Cana. We can be sure that God is still surrounding us with abundance, so, why can't we see it?

Perhaps it is because we need to shift from being disappointed by what is absent to being grateful for what is right before our

Stop Looking for the Beach (Continued)

eyes. Stop looking for the beach and admire the mountains.

Expectation fosters disappointment. Gratitude reveals abundance.

What are you grateful for that has emerged in the last year? Are you ZOOMing with colleagues weekly who you used to only see once a year? Do you enjoy the morning light in your kitchen, which you missed when you had to commute to work early every day? Are you closer to your pets? Have you mastered your bread recipe?

Expectation fosters disappointment. Gratitude reveals abundance.

In the Bible, when the Israelites had been

following Moses through the desert for a considerable time, they began to wish for things they had back in Egypt. "There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death" (Exodus 16:3). When we read it now, we laugh at the Israelites: "They are homesick for the past? Don't they know they have been set free from slavery?" They expected what had been before, and they were missing the very abundant blessing in their midst.

Expectation fosters disappointment. Gratitude reveals abundance.

Frankly, it's a little arrogant of us to think that we know what being abundantly blessed should look like. That's God's call. If the abundance in our lives doesn't meet our expectations, it's because our expectations are earthly. God's are divine. Look with eyes of gratitude and you may see that the abundance God has placed in your life exceeds your greatest imagining. Make a list. Keep a journal. Post joyfully on Facebook. Pray a prayer of thanksgiving. Begin and end your days with gratitude and I promise you, you will be able to see abundance. Thank God for the mountains. Stop looking for the beach.

Being Transformed by Christ

Brandon Nimz
Unite Ministries

In John 10:10, Jesus mentions that He has 'come that [we] may have life, and have it in all its fullness.' When we consider what happened to many early followers of Jesus—persecution that led to

some being arrested, stoned, or killed—we realize that this life He is speaking of likely has more to do with our perspectives and how we live in the moment than with the circumstances we are surrounded by. While I believe we have some control over our

perspectives, scripture also seems to show a growth process within believers, overseen by the Holy Spirit, that leads to many individual perspective shifts that help us experience life in all its fullness.

We first get some ideas

Being Transformed by Christ (Continued)

about how to start this process when Jesus tells us in Matthew 10:39, "Those who try to gain their own life will lose it; but those who lose their life for my sake will gain it." Romans 12:1-2 shows that this active surrender to Christ opens the door to change in our perspectives. "Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."

Though I have my part to do—offering myself as a living sacrifice and not being conformed to the pattern of this world—I am thankful that the verse doesn't tell me to transform myself but rather to 'be transformed.' Other translations are more direct about this process and read "let God transform you into

a new person by changing the way you think."

While surrendering our lives and trusting Christ opens the door to transformation starting, surrender tends to be an active process since we are living sacrifices. I have found in my life that as I follow Christ after having surrendered, I have a tendency to pick back up certain parts that should stay under the Holy Spirit. Thankfully, Christ is faithful to help me. In a similar way to the father in Mark 9 whose son needed healing, I often have to pray "Christ, I do trust you; help me with my lack of trust. I do want to surrender, help me let go of the parts of my life that I can't seem to let go of right now."

In the process of this surrender and of the Holy Spirit changing the way we think, we start to become more like Christ. Ephesians 4:15 says, "Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church." As that happens,

we tend to start to embody other perspectives in scripture—being thankful for all the blessings around us (because we can start to see them more), slowing down and actually listening to God and others more (and appreciating being able to), and looking at trials and suffering as opportunities for growth and even being legitimately joyful over those opportunities. All of these perspective changes, and more, begin to help us to have true, full life in the moment (thank God!).

I think Paul, who had been undergoing this transformation ever since He became a believer on the road to Damascus, sums it up well in Philippians 4:12-13. "I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength."