

“Continue the Work of Jesus: Celebrate Life”

John 10:10

4/25/10

Jesus said, *“I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.”*

That they—that’s you and me and all people—have abundant life.

We journey on this week in our mission statement as we hear such an important part of who we are as children of God in Christ:

We are made to Celebrate Life.

What does it mean to “Celebrate Life”?

What did Jesus mean when He said He gives us “abundant life”?

I have some Balloons for us this morning. We’re talking about Celebrate Life, which means that everyday is a party, right? Just be happy, put on a happy face, all that stuff.

But then I hear about all the earthquakes in the world and people dying. (Pop a balloon)

I hear about all the poor and powerless people. (pop)

I hear about all the strife in the Middle East. (pop)

I hear about the problems our own communities are facing with jobs, hunger, drugs.

(pop)

I know that some of you here at Oakland are facing tough days with illness and loss.(pop)

So what happened to all my balloons? I guess life isn’t a big party after all.

And yet, here we are this morning. We have gathered together, to be together and to worship. Amidst all that is going on in the world and in our lives, something has brought us here. Something is going on that has stirred us to say, We are going to celebrate life today.

God has given us life—the air in our lungs and the breath of His Holy Spirit.

What do we do with it? is an extremely important question. It is the most important question, really.

So I am going to use this balloon as an image for our lives. This is my life. It’s a little droopy right now. Not much shape to it. How do I give it shape? I can stretch it. Pull it. Wad it up.

No, you say? It needs air to fill it? Okay, how? I can swing it around really fast to try and get air in it. Maybe if I let it sit, air will just kind of slide in there.

No, you say? I have to use the air I have been given, the breath I have been given to fill it. Use that as our image this morning for celebrate life.

As I celebrate life, as I give thanks to God, as I live a life of gratitude, as I celebrate life with others around me, my life begins to take shape. (blow up balloon—get a clothing pin to keep the air in)

There are mornings, Sunday mornings, that I am tired and maybe not feeling like I am up for worshipping. It happens. We’re human.

But it’s no coincidence that every time I leave here after worship I have an entirely different outlook on life. Something happens. It’s not just the music, although that’s important. It’s not just the things we do. But all things together, all of us together, here with God, knowing that God is up to something, opening myself fully to God’s presence for an hour, giving God thanks and praise for the fact that I have breath and true life in Him—That is a celebration of life.

To Celebrate Life means Worship.

Psalm 33 tells us to *“Rejoice in the Lord...Sing to Him a new song...with loud shouts.”* Why? *“Because the word of the Lord is upright, and all His work is done in faithfulness...the earth is full of the steadfast love of the Lord.”*

What do you expect when you come to worship?

Joanne Weil says, “My young son asked what the highest number I had ever counted to was. I didn’t know, but I asked about his highest number. It was 5,372.

‘Oh,’ I said. ‘Why did you stop there?’ ‘Church was over.’”

“Worship brings all kinds of responses,” Jennifer Smith from Michigan says, “as I observed in church recently.” She says, “An elderly woman was standing with eyes closed and hands raised in prayer and praise. The three-year-old standing in the pew in front of her turned around and gave her a high-five!”

However you express your gratitude to God, whatever it looks like, sounds like, we are here to celebrate life.

We worship our God who came to us in Jesus, spoke our language, felt our pain, and lived out a love which knows no conditions. We worship Him, completely open and vulnerable before Him, that we might know the freedom which lies in Him. It is a freedom from all that keeps you from truly living your life to its fullest—freedom from the sin in our lives, from those things which weigh us down or keep us bottled up, from those things which keep us from being intimate with God, from our rules and regulations for how we ought to worship Him, which can only happen in Him.

From the beginning of time, with Adam and Eve, God’s first creations, God desired that we would live in an intimate relationship with Him. And as we worship Him together, we are expressing to God that we desire the same.

Do you come with anticipation, expectancy, that God is going to do something?

Alive. Spirit-breathed.

And so we take shape as we celebrate life together. (balloon)

But it’s not just here in this place.

To Celebrate Life means Daily Awareness.

Psalm 118:24 says, *“This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.”*

God has not only made this day, but it alive and fully present within it, all the time. Celebrate life is opening up our senses to God’s presence 24 hours a day.

You know what happens when you let the balloon sit on the floor for a long time? You come back a week later and it’s shrunk. The air slowly seeps out of it until it loses its shape.

Jesus says in Luke 9:23-24, *“If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it.”*

Daily awareness of God’s presence. Daily decision to follow. And in so doing we have life.

How can you be more intentional in being aware of God’s presence?

As the recent winter approached, *USA Today* writer Larry Copeland wrote a story about the danger of "peephole" driving. Anyone who lives in the frozen north has likely been a peephole driver at some point. You're in a hurry to get to work on time, and when you walk out into the cold you find that your car is encased in a layer of snow and ice from an overnight storm. You start the car and turn up the heater. You get out your scraper and battle to chip out a clear space on your windshield. After a few minutes you have cleared away an opening the size

of a large pepperoni pizza. You are now shivering and miserable, and you realize this will take 10 more minutes. So you move to the rear window and scrape off a narrower opening the size of a small sausage pizza with extra olives and do the same with the side windows. You throw caution to the frigid winds and get in the car and drive away.

Then it hits you: you can hardly see. You drive really slow and lean up close to the windshield and peer out your peephole and hope against hope that you don't run into anyone before the heater and defrosters melt more of the ice away from your windows. Worse yet, as you peer out your peephole, you notice that other drivers are peering out their peepholes!

So often in life we drive around like peephole drivers, barely seeing what's all around us. And yet Acts 17:28 says, "*In God we live and move and have our being. He is not far from each one of us.*"

If God is present, how can we not expect something good?

Barbara Brown Taylor says it this way: "What we have lost... is a full sense of the power of God—to recruit people who have made terrible choices; to invade the most hopeless lives and fill them with light; to sneak up on people who are thinking about lunch, not God, and smack them upside the head with glory."

I asked some of you this week what it means to celebrate life. There were some common answers: Giving thanks to God for each day we have; Being in relationship with one another and the support we receive from one another.

I didn't hear anything about life being perfect or everyday being a party, because if you are alive in this world you know that reality says otherwise. Life is not perfect. In fact, we deal with a lot of tough stuff.

But celebrating life is the daily awareness that God is present, looking for what God is up to, and sharing all this with others.

To Celebrate Life means Hope.

We all have bad days. Bad things happen. There are a lot of bad things happening in the world.

Did you ever wake up and feel like (let the air out of the balloon in a loud manner)?

How do we celebrate life in the midst of fear and turmoil?

In *Time* magazine's regular column "10 Questions," readers are given the opportunity to interview celebrities and world leaders through questions submitted via e-mail. In the March 22, 2010, issue of *Time*, South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu, author of [*Made for Goodness*](#) (HarperOne, 2010), was featured. Here are two questions readers submitted, each followed by Tutu's answer:

"After all you've seen and endured, are you really as optimistic as your book, [*Made for Goodness*](#), says you are?" (Zelalem Dawit, Addis Ababa)

Tutu: I'm not optimistic, no. I'm quite different. I'm hopeful. I am a prisoner of hope. In the world, you have very bad people—Hitler, Idi Amin—and they look like they are going to win. All of them—all of them—have bitten the dust.

"What is your favorite Bible verse and why?" (Satu Rahikainen)

Tutu: [Romans 5:8](#). "[While] we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." It sums up the Gospel wonderfully. We think we have to impress God so that God could love us. But he says, "No, you are loved already, even at your worst."

"10 Questions," Time magazine (3-22-10), p. 4

Celebrate life means hope. It means my life is built on something deeper and greater than anything this world has to offer.

Psalm 1 says, *“Happy are those...whose delight is in the law of the Lord...They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither.”*

Wafula is an African man who studied with us at Bethany Seminary. One evening as we studied these words from Jesus, *“Anyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like the foolish man who built his house on the sand,”* Wafula began to tell us how utterly deprived his people are where he is from. Many are starving. They regularly lose loved ones. They struggle everyday. And yet he said they worship and praise God like nowhere else he has seen.

In the midst of turmoil they celebrate life, together, lifting each other up, celebrating each other’s lives. How do we help each other be hopeful?

Someone else I talked with this week, Kaysa Meeks, who is struggling with cancer and not feeling well, said celebrate life means sometimes being willing to have someone else fill my balloon. There are days I don’t have the air; some days I don’t feel much like giving thanks.

But that is when the people around us step in and provide the air to give us shape.

To celebrate life means we live it together.

Kaysa went on to say that she is grateful for each day she has, and that there is something good in each day. And so important are the people around her—praying, sharing a thought, a visit, a meal. When she loses perspective, others are there to help her see it.

I can celebrate life when I have perspective on this life.

“Celebrate Life” means I have Hope that this moment is not all there is. The birds will sing again, the sun will shine again, there will be better days. And even when these days on earth are done, God gave us hope in Christ that an eternal, perfect life awaits.

Jesus said, *“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.”* John 14:27

It’s rare, if not just impossible, that you have a day that is perfect and all good.

The same is true for being all bad.

Most of the time the good and bad exist side by side as we travel along in life. And so I am convinced that we are not to ignore either one of them. But see it for what it is.

Take a breath. You’re alive. Celebrate that. Because there are others here in this very room who will with you. And the One who made us all *“rejoices over you with gladness.”* Amen.