

STANLEY HAUERWAS: ABUNDANT LIFE

Trinity Institute, *The Good News Now – Evolving with the Gospel of Jesus*

It's been lovely being with you these days, and I appreciate the work of the Trinity Institute, and for the invitation to be part of it. The answer is quite simply Jesus. He is the life that is abundant. He is the love that cannot be used up, because it is the love that is the relationship between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. So in John 10:10, Jesus tells us that he has come that we might have life, abundant life. That life that Jesus offers is not a zero sum game. It is not a life against the background of scarcity. It is not, because by being engrafted into the life of Jesus, we discover that the more we give, the more we learn to love, the more we have to give, the more we are able to love.

Some may find Jesus referenced in the passage in John to sheep a bit awkward, because we are the sheep for whom he lays down his life, but to be associated with such sheep is not a very attractive association. But it is clear that to be part of such a flock means you must constantly be open to new sheep, which means, I think, one way that we are invited to think about abundant life is that we have been given, through being engrafted into Jesus' flock, an abundance that is the simple recognition that we are not alone. To be given life by Jesus is to have our lives overwhelmed by his life. By being overwhelmed by his life, we discover our lives are intertwined in a manner that I cannot make sense of my life without the lives of others, most of who are dead.

I think this life is a stark alternative to the life many lead today, which I take to be lives of quiet desperate loneliness. My way of putting this is we live at a time, you may call it modern, if you so desire, when we believe we should have no story, except the story we chose when we had no story. We live at a time when we believe we should have no story, except the story we chose when we had no story. We call this freedom.

If you do not believe that that is the story that stories our lives, I ask you do you believe that you ought to be held responsible for decisions you made when you did not know what you were doing? No. On the whole, none of us believe we should be held responsible for decisions we made when we did not know what we were doing, because we were not free. Of course, the difficulty with the story that you should have no story, other than the story you chose when you had no story, which means that you can only be held responsible for decisions you made when you knew what you were doing, that story, of course, makes marriage unintelligible. How would you ever know what you were doing when you promised lifelong monogamous fidelity? Or if it makes marriage unintelligible, try having children. (Laughter) You never get the ones you want. (Laughter)

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It is a story, that is, the story that we should have no story, except the story we chose when we had no story, it is a story that has at its heart the attempt to make us tyrants of our own lives. But no one is more lonely than tyrants. Since they must always distrust everyone around them, because they know that they want their place, of course, the problem with the story that you should have no story, except the story you chose when you had no story, is you did not choose that story. That is the reason that often the presumptions of many today, about their lives, is a quiet form of desperation that means that their lives are fated, and they cannot acknowledge they are so. It is crucial, however, that the way I put the matter, you should have no story except the story you chose when you had no story, is put as a story, because the concept of a story suggests that we are, as a matter of fact, inexorably storied, and we must acknowledge that.

Abundant life, the life that Jesus offers, is a storied life made possible by a common life that recognizes that before we were, we were storied by a story we did not choose. It is called creation. It is called redemption. And that story, the story of creation, the story of redemption makes possible friendships between strangers, just to the extent we learn that we share a common story that we have not chosen.

Let me elaborate. The life abundant Jesus makes possible is to be made participants in the story of God's good care of us through creation. We are sheep, because as sheep, we do not get to choose our shepherd. We've been called into a life of a people through which we discover who we are through the stories we tell to one another, stories of our discovery that we are gift, we are gift. We don't exist and receive a gift, but our very existence is gift. We do not get to choose that we are so gifted. We receive it and discover we are glad that we have been so gifted. But the story that has storied us as gift is so rich, the details having many subplots, that means by being engrafted into a people shaped by the story that they had not chosen is one that offers infinite possibilities of discoveries of our differences that make the story so absolutely entertaining.

At the heart of such life, at the heart of such life is friendship. For it is through friendship that our willful loneliness, loneliness created by the presumption we should have no story except the story we chose when we had no story, is overwhelmed. Friendship is not the desperate attempt, based on our presumption we must manipulate another to recognize us, but rather friendship in the Christian tradition names such an engagement that we call worship. For it is in worship that we discover that we are related to one another in ways that we could not imagine, by being made friends with God through the sharing of the body and blood of Christ. That is why the world should stand and wonder of these people called Christian, because they would say see how they love one another, even to enjoin their differences, which brings me to what I think is the particular good news about the

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abundant life that Jesus has made possible; namely, to receive life from Jesus as friendship with him and with one another is to be given something to do. How wonderful it is to simply be given in this life something to do. We can pray. We can worship. We can be friends, because those are not activities that can be used up.

One of my favorite prayers from *The Book of Common Prayer* is a prayer to be prayed when we are sick. It reads, “This is another day, oh, Lord. I know not what it will bring. But make me ready, Lord, for whatever it may be. If I am to stand up, help me stand bravely. If I am to sit still, help me sit quietly. If I am to be low, help me to be so patiently. And if I am to do nothing, let me do it gallantly. Make these words more than words, and give me the spirit of Jesus. Amen.”

If I am to do nothing, but I can do it gallantly, is to live life abundantly, making it possible for our lives to make one another’s lives more than we otherwise could possibly be. That is life abundant. Thank you very much.