

“What Is My Dream?”

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John 10:1-11

Dreams, we all have dreams. What is your dream?

Is it to build a business selling your new invention?

Is it to complete your training to be a doctor and become a medical missionary in Ghana?

Is your dream to vacation in New Zealand?

Is it to be a movie star?

I listened to a TED talk a few days ago from America Ferrera, the actress. She said that when she was young and poor she had a dream of being an actress. It wasn't because she saw people in movies like herself or because she was trying to prove anything to anyone.

Against all odds, she worked tirelessly to break new ground in the acting world as a leading Latina woman. This was something that simply fit who she was and she eventually succeeded. The work, while being very difficult, continues

to feed her soul. It has also created other opportunities for her to make a difference in the world.

We could say that America's life is full.

I have to take a minute to set the stage for the reading today.

Jesus has just healed a blind man on the sabbath, and this created a great stir among some of the most religious Jews around, called Pharisees.

Their vision was so narrow and their lives constricted because they were focused so much on whether an action was right or wrong according to the law that they missed the whole point of living.

These Pharisees were trying to trap Jesus and kill him because he seemed to break rules and threaten their control over the proper way to be religious.

Jesus called them spiritually blind.

READ JOHN 10:1-11

Isn't it interesting that Jesus was trying to communicate with but John writes that they didn't get it, so he takes another run at it sharing in a different way. After verse 11, he actually takes a third stab at it. They are truly blind.

Jesus was using a reference point (sheep) that the people of his day would have understood because there were lots of sheep herds all around the land.

A shepherd would not run behind a herd of sheep to get them to go somewhere. Instead, a good shepherd would know the sheep under their care, their unique qualities and personality.

And the sheep would also know their shepherd. When they heard the voice of their shepherd, they would perk up their ears and follow. They know that their shepherd was there to feed them, protect them and care for them.

There would at times be stone walled pens where sheep would stay at night to be protected. Instead of a gate that would open and close, there would be an opening in the wall. At night the shepherd would sleep laying across this “gate” space.

The only proper entry or exit in or out of the pen was granted by the shepherd through the “gate” opening.

Jesus was talking about himself as the “gate for the sheep.” Of course, those who follow Jesus are considered his sheep in this story.

It is the good gatekeeping shepherd who provides an identity for the sheep, because the sheep identify strongly with the shepherd.

The good shepherd will guide the sheep to good pastures so that they might be well fed and cared for.

The good shepherd also protects the sheep from wolves or other wild animals that might harm them out in the wilderness, especially at night. Shepherds were skilled with the sling and staff to defend against anything that might cause harm to any of their sheep.

Jesus said that good shepherds will actually lay down their own life for the sake of the sheep under their care.

What an amazing God we have who looks after us, cares for us and protects us in this way.

Jesus said something else which I think is the center point of this whole passage. Jesus talked about the core of his intention and interest in us as his herd — this was a relationship that allows us to have life and have it abundantly, as the New Revised Standard Version puts it.

I like how others have translated John 10:10.

In the New International Version, Jesus says, “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”

The New Living Translation says “My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life.”

My favorite is The Message translation. Eugene Peterson, who did this translation, put it this way, “I came so they can have real and eternal life, more and better life than they ever dreamed of.”

If God’s intention is that we have such an amazing life that is real and full and better than even our wildest dreams — if this is God’s desire for us, it begs the question:

Does God want us to have everything we desire, everything we want, everything that has transfixed our eyes and has us salivating: that beautiful new house, that brand new Lamborghini, the perfect job, the most amazing of children who never complain, talk back or roll their eyes, and always follow our rules, while excelling at every sport they try. Need I go on?

If God wants me to have a life filled up with even more than my dreams, then is it my God-given right to have all of those things I

have always wanted and dreamed about?

This kind of message, sometimes called the “prosperity gospel,” has been preached using John 10:10 among other passages, since the 19th century.

This way of reading scripture gives people the notion that they are entitled to, by decree of God, an extravagant life of wealth with huge mansions, private jets, and the most expensive cars. It also tells them that if they have enough faith God will grant them great physical health as well.

Is this what Jesus had in mind?

It is pretty clear that not Jesus or any of his followers recorded in the Bible lived this way or advocated for this kind of lifestyle.

In fact, Jesus taught about the dangers and temptations of being focused on money and possessions. When these things become our focus in life they can easily hold greater priority than serving God. This is called idolatry.

Jesus certainly was not advocating this kind of self-centered, ego-driven approach to life.

If possessing more and better stuff was not Jesus’ point, then what

kind of abundant life was he talking about?

Let's look again at Jesus. He provided for his original 12 disciples and now for us an example to follow of a life well lived that radiated fullness. What really provided for a great life according to Jesus?

One of the central tenants of the life of Jesus was that he lived for the sake of others. This is part of the example of the shepherd he used in this story.

It wasn't about him and his ego. It was very clear, his life was lived for others. If we get this point alone, our lives will be transformed.

When we think about a dream, there is a litmus test that we can all take to see if it might be part of the abundant life that God desires for us. It begins with awareness of what is going on inside us, in particular with our ego. If a dream is anchored into our ego, we can be assured that it would fail the litmus test.

Our ego is a distraction from the abundant life that God desires for us. The ego is that inner voice that continually evaluates ourselves, other people, and the world.

This shows up as a constant commentary about everything around us, often as critical judgements and complaints. Our ego evaluates if things are good or bad, right or wrong. It shows up as irritation, impatience, annoyance, anger, and even sadness.

The Pharisees who Jesus was talking with were stuck in their ego. They were caught in the small details of critical evaluation based on a legal code and could not see that God in the flesh was staring them in the face.

Eckhart Tolle, is a spiritual teacher who has written extensively about the ego. He says that the ego drives our sense of identity — both what we believe about ourselves and what other people say that we then believe as truth about us.

Tolle says that the ego is so centered inwardly that it cuts us off from other people by drawing a distinct line between me and everybody else.

The work is to become aware of our ego voice. When we do, we begin realizing that our ego voice presents a constant chatter of evaluation literally throughout every day.

When we see the chatter for what it is, we can acknowledge it and

simply be present. The interesting thing is that when we are aware of our ego's voice it begins to lose its grip on us and we become free.

When we can truly be present in the moment, then as Psalm 46 says we can be still and know God. We can also be still and see clearly our dreams.

The dream litmus test is done in the stillness. We hold our dream and notice if it is tied to our ego.

Do we want this dream in order to look good in front of other people?

Do we want it in order to be better than others or to prove something to someone?

Do we want the dream in order to satisfy what we think of as a deficiency in our lives?

Do we want the dream in order to gain status for ourselves or seem important?

If the answer is yes to any of these, then we know that we are dealing with our ego and therefore the dream is not part of the abundant life that God desires for us.

Let's take for example being a medical missionary. There might be some people who want to do this work, which seems altruistic

and selfless, who are willing to go through all of the training and sacrificing only because they are trying to prove that they are good enough. Maybe in a certain social circle the person feels that this kind of work provides access to be viewed by others as good.

When this person goes through all of the trouble to become a medical missionary, it very likely will not be fulfilling or lead to the kind of abundant life Jesus described, because the work is only to feel the ego.

Others may want to do the same thing but it is not tied to the ego. They want to do it because they have a gift or ability and they simply want to give and be of service to others. When this person becomes a missionary, they more likely will be filled up by giving to others.

I remember when I was in massage school back in 1998 one of my fellow students wanted to be a massage therapist to satisfy her ego. I remember her making a comment one day referring to some naysayers in her life, "I'll show them. I'm going to make a ton of money doing this work."

That was the voice of the ego and it never leads to abundant life

What does lead to an abundant and full life is unhooking from the ego, finding a dream that hums within you as a resonating “YES,” share about it with others who can support you, and then do everything you can to make it a reality.