

Fourth Sunday of Easter – St Paul’s Manuka – 7 May, 2017
Preacher: The Venerable Dr Brian Douglas

Acts 2: 42-47

Psalm 23

1 Peter 2: 1-10

John 10: 1-10

What is life? Is it just a collection of incidents strung together between our birth and our death? Is it just time?

Life, Jesus tells today that life is something which is abundant. An abundant life is one full of meaning and depth and purpose. It is a gift to us from God which comes to us free and without strings attached. We can do with life what we want – we can enjoy it, make use of it or make a mess of it.

Life though is not just yours or mine. It is a shared gift – one we have in common with the rest of creation. We can choose to share life with others or we can choose to make life difficult for others and for ourselves. We can choose to respect the creation or abuse it. We can choose to fight with others or we can choose to live in peace. The abundance of life for us depends greatly on what we choose to do with the free gift of life.

Life continues though whether we like it or not. We cannot slow it down or speed it up. It has a regularity about it and once a day has gone we cannot get it back.

There can be an uncertainty about life as well. We do not know what tomorrow will bring. But despite the regularity and the uncertainty life is one of the most precious gifts we can have.

You may have heard of Thomas Edison, the famous American scientist and inventor. He invented the electric light bulb and worked tirelessly all his life collecting information and analysing it. Towards the end of his life a great disaster occurred. One night in 1914 his laboratory was destroyed by fire. At the height of the fire Edison’s 24 years old son Charles searched frantically for his father among the smoke and rubble. He finally found him, calmly watching the fire, his face glowing red from the flames and his white hair blowing in the wind.

“I felt so sorry for him”, Charles later said. “He was 67 – no longer a young man and his whole life’s work had gone up in flames. All the results of his life’s work were going up in smoke before his eyes. Everything he had discovered and worked for was lost.”

It was as he watched the fire though that Thomas Edison said something quite unusual to his son. He said: “Charles go and find your mother. She will never see a fire this good as long as she lives”.

The next morning Edison looked at the ruins of his laboratory and said something else quite unusual. As he stood there staring at the ruins of his life’s work he said, “There is great value in disaster. All the mistakes of our lives are burned up. Thank God we can start again.”

Three week later Edison invented the record player, which along with the light bulb are two of the world’s greatest inventions.

Life can have disasters as well as joys. Life has good times as well as bad. Life is not always pleasant. Like Thomas Edison though we have the chance to make the most of our disasters as well as our successes.

People who believe in God also believe that life is a gift from God. God has freely given us this world and our chance to live in it. We have the God-given chance to share our lives with others and to do something worthwhile. We here in Australia have a better chance of doing that than most of the people in the world.

So Jesus’ words in the Bible passage are very important. Jesus tells us that he came so that we might have life and have it abundantly. The gift that Jesus gives us is not just what could be spared or what was left over. The gift that Jesus brings is abundant life to cover over or burn up all the mistakes and the sins of our lives. Jesus’ gift to us of life is total – his life – an it is in that power that life that we have new life. The season of Easter which we are celebrating is a reminder to us of the fact that God has given us new life and the chance to start again through faith.

In order to enjoy life to the full we need to live it to the full. Life is meant to be an abundant and growing thing – not stale and lifeless. Life is about the total person – not just our physical bodies, but our minds, our emotions and

our spirits as well. Life if it is full is about you and me trying to use all the gifts we have been given – body, mind and spirit.

Spiritual growth means realising that there is a God beyond our selves and that God cares for and wants us to live life to the full. Through our prayers, our Bible, our worship and our faith in God and the work of Jesus for us in dying and rising again we come to know God more closely day by day. Spiritual growth means that we begin to realise that we are not all there is and that beyond us there is a God who loves us.

There are times when belief in God is tough and we will have disasters in our lives and in our belief, but like Thomas Edison, all our mistakes are burned up and we start afresh. This is really the message of Easter, one where the mistakes or sins are covered over by the death of Christ, and we are given new life through the power of the resurrection. Easter is the time when things are put right between us and God. Jesus Christ dies and rises again and it is the power that victory over death that covers up our mistakes and shows us the path of new life and new hope. This is the message we hear in the first letter of Peter. We can come to Christ and build in him a spiritual home where Christ is the cornerstone. In Christ we are a chosen race, not because of our works but his. In Christ we are a people who have received God's mercy and love. It is in this power that our lives can be abundant.

May you have life as we share life together – life in body, mind and spirit – sealed with faith in Jesus Christ – the giver of new life. May our lives be abundant in the way God has created them and empowered us to live them. May our lives be abundant as Easter people through the power of Jesus' new life. May our lives be abundant in the power of the Spirit.