

**April 30, 2023**  
**Fourth Sunday of Easter**

**Meditation:** “An Embarrassment of Riches”

If I had to condense the entire Bible down into one sound bite, it would be the second half of verse 10 of chapter 10 of John’s gospel. “I came that you may have life and have it in abundance.” Right about now I better add a caution to this. There is a thing called the ‘prosperity gospel’ and it is common amongst televangelists like Joel Osteen. They would probably take this text and say something like, ‘Jesus loves you and wants to bless you with abundance. He wants you to have that new Cadillac your heart yearns for. He wants you to have that new BMW. He wants you to have that new Mercedes too. He wants you to have a mansion, a yacht, a private jet, and everything else you desire. Jesus wants to bless you with abundance and all you have to do is.....’ Doubtless they would quote the prayer of Jabez, found in chapter four of the first book of Chronicles: “Oh, that you would bless me and enlarge my territory and that your hand might be with me and that you would keep me from hurt and harm.” In fact, I believe there was a study book on the prayer of Jabez a few years back. Perhaps it is the prayer of Jabez that Galen Weston has been reciting, oh that you would bless me and expand my business holdings and my positions and help me earn, well, what was it he earned last year? \$11M in total, \$8.4M of that from Loblaws alone.

In his book, *The Happiness Equation*, Neil Pasricha says that we live in a culture of excess. We are never happy with what we have, and so we seek bigger and fancier and more expensive and just plain more. It might have started out with those who survived the Great Depression who did not have enough and were afraid of not having enough again, but it has become an obsession in our time. There was a time when many did not have enough to live on. And now people seem unable to get enough, even though they have excess. Just to be clear, when Jesus said, “I came that you may have life and have it in abundance,” I don’t believe living a life of excess material possessions is what Jesus meant.

Did you hear about the teacher who asked her students to write down the list of the seven wonders of the world. She walked around the classroom and took note that, while most of the children had quickly completed the list, one little girl was struggling with the list. The teacher asked if the girl was having problems with the list. The girl said yes, and the teacher asked her classmates for some hints. The leaning tower of Pisa, said one. The pyramid of Giza, said another. The Great Wall of China, chimed in a third. The girl said she had none of those on her list. Well, said the teacher derisively, what is on your list? To see, to hear, to touch, to taste, to feel, to laugh, and to love.

As impressive as the leaning tower of Pisa, the pyramid of Giza, the Great Wall of China, a Cadillac, a BMW, a Mercedes Benz, a mansion, a yacht, or an executive jet are, they are just things. They do not represent real riches. When I worked with the homeless in Toronto I noticed that the one thing that they all lacked, the one thing that made them truly poor, the one thing that kept them from escaping their situation, was that they did not have a support network, you know, friends and colleagues and family. The one thing they lacked was somebody who loved them. True wealth is having somebody who cares about us, loves us, no matter what. That is why you will often see a homeless person with a dog or a cat. It is something that loves them unconditionally.

When Jesus said that he came that we may have life in abundance, I think he meant not that we be wealthy by the standards of the world, but that we would be rich in other ways: that we could see the beauty of a sunset over the lake, that we could hear the birds singing their song at sunrise, that we could feel the softness of a baby's skin, that we could taste the richness of good chocolate, or any meal cooked by the UCW, that we could feel deep sorrow and great joy, that we could laugh, and mostly that we could love and be loved.

We, you and I, are wealthy beyond belief. Take a look at your life. We, all of us here, have shelter. We have food in our kitchens. We have spare change on our dressers, and bank accounts with money in them. We have some source of regular income. We have a closet full of clothes. And, as if that were not enough, we have our friends, we have our families, we have our church family. Just take a look around you at how big your family is. And in two weeks we will welcome another member into the family when Jamar is baptized. God has blessed us and expanded our social networks, giving us more people to love and be loved by. Truly we are blessed. Truly we have an embarrassment of riches. Thanks be to God. Amen.