

February 2024: Life in all its fullness

The days shortly after Christmas, and into the New Year, are usually days when Richard and I try to do as little as possible, relaxing and recovering from the hectic diary that is my normal experience for a month or so before Christmas. This year that didn't happen, and I found myself reflecting on the Christian understanding of 'fullness of life.'

In John 10, Jesus told his disciples that, 'I have come that they may have life, and have it abundantly.' Various Bible versions translate this 'abundant life,' as 'have life fully,' 'life to the full,' 'life to the fullest,' 'life in all its fullness,' 'life to overflowing.' Throughout Christian history, there have always been Christians and churches that seem to have interpreted this as meaning Jesus promises a good life full of joy, a life where nothing bad ever happens, if we fully trust God. I believe Jesus does promise a life full of joy, but certainly not one where Christians are immune from the misfortune and heartache that affects 'ordinary people'.

Our New Year was overshadowed, as I know nearly all lives are at some point, by sadness; by the sudden, unexpected death of a young member of the family, followed a few days later by the death of our dearly loved dog. What, I asked - as I often have - does abundant life look like in those circumstances? What does joy look like? One tribute to Emily from a community group described her life as 'full of energy and colour.' A warm-hearted, welcoming person, very much involved in her community, her whole life reached out to others. And she was a brilliant, patient, enthusiastic mum for her two young children. And our dog Barney brought us both hard work and joy, as we watched him progress from a deeply traumatised, 'unrehomable,' cruelty case, to a loving, trusting, family pet.

I have believed for decades that what Jesus offers us, in 'abundant life,' is the opportunity to become fully human; in fact I believe that that is the very essence of Christian faith. Not a life free from pain, but a life where we are not afraid to risk the pain that inevitably comes from loving deeply and fully and generously. A life where we are willing to take risks with relationships. Where we are willing to offer ourselves to others, knowing that our love may not be returned, and may even be abused. A life where we know that our worth does not depend on how others treat us, but on how God loves us, and how we love others. A life where we actively seek to dismantle the barriers that separate us from one another and from God's world. A life where 'having abundant life,' means 'being fully alive' to both the joy and the pain that comes from knowing we belong to others.

And so, as we continue through 2024, my prayer for us all, is for 'abundant life.'

Yours in Christ,
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