

That you may have life

John 20:19-31

April 12, 2026

I invite you to remain standing. That's an invitation, not a command! Create some space for yourself. Hold your arms out to the side, palms forward. Now breathe in, and let it out. Breathe in again, and let it out.

Now lift your chin, close your eyes, and take in a deep breath. Hold it for a moment, and let it out. Do it again. Now keeping your eyes closed and your palms forward, breathe, just breathe, just be.

What do you feel?

Do you feel the air pulsing in and out of your lungs? Do you feel the sun-warmed air on your skin? Does the air you take into your body carry with it a scent of flowers, a hint of spring?

Do you feel your mind, stilled, relaxed, but not empty, alert to the sound of my voice, but alert to other sensations, too? Do you feel your mind and spirit alert and aware and open to all that may come to you in this moment from outside or inside?

Do you feel, even with your eyes closed, the presence of those around you, aware that you are not alone here, aware that you breathe the same air, aware that you share this one moment in time, aware that together all of us will receive whatever this one moment in time may bring?

What do you feel? Do you feel alive? Does it feel good? Does it feel good just to be alive?

You may open your eyes and take your seat.

I don't know all of what each of you bring with you to this sanctuary this morning, what infirmities or burdens, what worry or grief, maybe fear, maybe doubt. Even so, even so, isn't it good to be alive, just to be alive in this one moment, in this one place? Isn't there so much that is good about being alive, about all there is to see and hear and taste and know, in spite of the troubles, shall we say, Elaine, "despite everything?" To have life is to have possibility, almost limitless possibility: the possibility of seeing and hearing and smelling and tasting and touching, the possibility of healing wounds old and new, the possibility of reconciling broken relationships, the possibility of discovering beauty, the possibility of making beauty, the possibility of joy. Because that is what God made you for — joy!

Life is good. Life is good. And even if it may be that some one might come at some point in their life to prefer death over life, it is not a repudiation of the value of life itself, is it, rather a belief that their own life has become unbearable, that it is not life as it should be. As it should be, because life itself is good.

Life is good! Life is God's gift. Life is what God intends for you. Life is what God wants for you. Life is good news. Life is the gospel.

Life is the crux of John's gospel, from the last page to the first.

These [things] have been written, John says, in order that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through your faith in him you may have life.

And you may remember that John's gospel begins this way ...

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ... all things came into being through the Word ... in the Word was life.

This Word to whom John bears witness, the Word made flesh, God with us, the one who comes to share our common lot, this Jesus, is the source of life. In John's gospel, Jesus says.

I have come in order that you might have life — life in all its fullness.

Jesus says ...

I am the bread of life.

Jesus says ...

I am the light of the world and whoever follows me will have the light of life.

To a Samaritan woman, Jesus says ...

Those who drink the water that I will give them will never be thirsty again ... the water that I will give them will become in them a spring which will provide them with life-giving water and give them eternal life.

And to Nicodemus Jesus says ...

God loved the world so much that God gave God's only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not die but have eternal life.

Life, eternal life. Life, eternal life. Life in all its fullness, life-giving water, the light of life, eternal life. Doesn't it seem that John uses "life" and "eternal life" interchangeably? And what about this?

Those who hear my words and believe in him who sent me have eternal life ... they will not be judged, but have already passed from death to life.

Have already passed from death to life! John's gospel declares that life, may I say eternal life, is not just a future hope, but a present possibility. Eternal life is not merely, or even primarily, about life that is extended, but about life that is made full and right and good. Eternal life is not merely, or even primarily, about quantity, but about quality, not about heaven, but about shalom. "Peace (shalom) be with you," Jesus said. "Peace be with you." Peace be with you.

Life is good and life is meant for goodness, now. Jesus comes to bring life, life in all its fullness, life lived and shared in shalom, now. Life that builds up, not tears down. Life that creates, not destroys. Life that reconciles, not divides. Life that shows mercy, not cruelty. Life that is life-giving, not death-dealing. Or as Pope Leo put it yesterday a prayer vigil for peace in St. Peter's Basilica ...

*Enough of the idolatry of self and money! Enough of the display of power!
Enough of war! True strength is shown in serving life.*

Jesus comes to bring that life and Jesus is the source of that life. Jesus is the life. Jesus is the truth. Jesus is the way. John said that, too! Jesus brings life by telling the truth. Jesus brings life by showing the way. We have life, life in all its fullness, as we follow that way, as we follow him, as we walk by his light, as we walk with him.

Jesus is the source of life, now. We have life, life that is good, life that is full, life that is eternal, as we live in union with him. That is what makes Jesus' death so devastating. The life-giver is rendered lifeless. The truth-teller is silenced. There is no one left with whom to walk. So how can we know the way? The way is lost. Jesus' way is repudiated. The way of death wins. Fear, jealousy, brutality, hatred, the way of this world, the way of despair, the way of death, win. And there is left on earth only silence, only emptiness, only a kind of life that is a mockery of what it is meant to be, slowly and surely decaying into oblivion.

But! But God! But God raised him up! Jesus is vindicated. Jesus' way is vindicated. Truth is vindicated. Life is vindicated. And that power, the power that raised Jesus from death, the power of resurrection, the power of life, is even now at work among us. Because of the resurrection of Jesus, it is still, now, and forever true that "in him is life."

This is why Easter is the linchpin of our faith, because the way of mercy, the way of love, the way of shalom, has prevailed. It is the way! The one who is our source of life, Jesus, is alive! And with him, by him, in him, we live, too.

Can you believe it? Do you believe it?

These [things] have been written — and these things are now preached — in order that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through your faith in him you may have life.

In order that you may believe ... Belief is not about assenting to an idea or subscribing to a creed. It's not about saying the right words so you merit a passport into heaven. It's about your life now, about opening yourself up to all the wonders and possibilities of life here and now, about entering into communion with the One who knows what life is about and what it is for, the One who knows and shows how life is meant to be lived, the One who is the source of life, the One who is the source of truth, the One who is the way.

Soren Kierkegaard was a Danish philosopher who lived and published in the mid-nineteenth century. In many ways, I believe it misleading to call him a philosopher. He was simply a Christian, a believer in Jesus, who believed that Christendom, the apparatus for teaching and practicing the way of Jesus, had lost its way. He said that in Denmark everybody thinks they are a Christian, and they have no idea what that means!

For Kierkegaard, being a Christian is a very particular and purposeful and personal thing, something requiring courage, commitment, and a faith ready to risk everything, to risk everything so that it might gain one thing ... life.

Kierkegaard said that there are no disciples at second hand. No one can follow Jesus by inherited faith, by hearsay, by being told about Jesus by someone else. You have to know Jesus for yourself! You have to see Jesus for yourself!

So thank God for Thomas, the one who “put [his] finger on the nub of things.”

Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.

You have to know Jesus for yourself! You have to see Jesus for yourself!

Jesus did not rebuke Thomas. He accommodated him. He showed Thomas what he needed to see. And Jesus will show you, too. “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.” You may not now see Jesus face-to-face, but Jesus will show you what you need to see in order to believe in him, in order to make the choice to follow him, in order to find in him the fullness of life God intends for you, the fullness of life God intends for all.

*I am always aware of the Lord's presence;
the Lord is near, and nothing can shake me.
And so I am thankful and glad, and I feel completely secure,
because you protect me from the power of death.
I have served you faithfully,
and you will not abandon me to the world of the dead.
You will show me the path that leads to life;
your presence fills me with joy
and brings me pleasure forever.*