

An abundant life

Heather Smith *reflects on* Acts 2:42-end and John 10:1-10

In today's Gospel we find an unexpected opposite. Stealing, killing and destruction – the thief's aim – are contrasted with abundant life brought by Jesus. Faced with a murderous thief, we might be grateful just to keep living – life is the opposite of death, surely? But in Jesus' world the opposite of death is abundance. He promises much more than simply repelling the thief.

Many people find their lives anything but abundant. Struggles to make ends meet, physical or mental health issues, wars and concern about the very existence of the planet are just some of the things that contribute to making life seem limited and tough. Abundant life, in contrast, is surely about having an easier life.

The reading from Acts gives us a picture of what abundance meant

for the first Christians. Two things stand out – good relationships and glad and generous hearts. The early Christians spent much time together, enjoying one another's company, with God at the centre. They ate together with joy, and instead of seeking to accumulate individual wealth they held everything in common. The choices they made brought the abundance that Jesus promised. What mattered was the deep joy they experienced, and they found the key to it in their response to Christ.

Gladness and generosity are deliberate choices that any of us can make. They turn us outwards, towards our fellow human beings, bringing new possibilities, whatever our circumstances, making life much more than just the opposite of death. 🍷

God, who transforms the limitations of our lives, give us glad and generous hearts. Make us outward looking, always seeking to share with others, that we may all experience your abundance. Amen.

Godparents

by Caroline Hodgson

So you've been invited to be a godparent – it's a great privilege. We're never too old or too important that such an honour doesn't cause us to glow with pride. At the same time – what an awesome responsibility! The Church of England says that godparents should help a godchild "think about the bigger questions in life – questions of love, hope

and faith". That's quite an ask, if you take it seriously. Is it something you're prepared to do, even when your godchild has toddler tantrums, or turns into a surly, inscrutable teenager? Whatever kind of godparent you are, your most important responsibility is to stay connected with your godchild throughout his or her life. So before you accept, take time to think and pray about it. This is a God-given opportunity to play a meaningful role in the life of another person. Are you willing and able to take on the challenge? 🍷



Cities of the Bible

Jericho

by Caroline Fletcher

Jericho is most famous for being conquered by Joshua. It's twenty-foot mudbrick walls collapsed after his army marched around it seven times. Before this Jericho had been occupied for thousands of years and was claimed to be the world's oldest city. Set in a desert plain, it's something of an oasis, built around a spring that was later purified by the prophet Elisha.

In New Testament times Herod the Great redeveloped Jericho to the south of where the old city had stood. The area's date palms and balsam trees made it wealthy and an important place for tax collection. Hence, Zacchaeus, the chief tax collector who climbed a tree to see Jesus, lived there.

Jericho is also described as the world's lowest city. A mountainous twisting road from it climbed steeply up to Jerusalem. This road was an infamous haunt for robbers, and the story of the Good Samaritan, who was attacked by thieves, took place on this road. 🍷

“The will of God will not take us where the grace of God cannot sustain us.

Billy Graham (1918-2018), evangelist