

“Got Life?”
Series: Life to the Fullest
Easter 2009
John 10:10, John 20:1-18, 1 John 5:10-13

Earlier this week I had the great joy I have every year at this time as I shared in our preschool’s annual Easter program. Moms and dads and grandparents gather and each class in the school sings songs or presents a poem about Easter. One of the classes sang this song: “*You put your bunny ears in, you put your bunny ears out, you put your bunny ears in and you wiggle them all about. You do the bunny pokey and you turn yourself around. That’s what it’s all about.*” It’s much cuter when three and four-year olds sing it. The Hokey Pokey. “*That’s what it’s all about.*” You’ve probably all done it at one time or another. But have you ever wondered: What if the Hokey Pokey really *is* what it’s all about?

Several weeks ago there was an article in the News Journal about the untimely death of a prominent local business owner. He had been hit by a car while jogging and was killed. He and his wife had just finished building their dream home. He was planning to retire in four years and spend his time in Florida with his wife, playing golf and enjoying his grandchildren. Very sad. His son made this statement: “It just really sucks that such a good man got struck down, especially when he was just a few years away from living his dream.” That really struck me. “He was just a few years away from living his dream.” His dream life was in the future. Just a few years away. Just out of reach.

Is that what it’s really all about? Working hard now so you can have your dream life when you retire? Maybe you think life will really be great *when*: When you get a new job, when you retire, when you get married, when you have kids, when the kids are potty-trained, or when they go to school all day, or when they get their lives together, or when you make x amount of money. How many years are *you* away from living your dream? How many years are *you* away from really enjoying your life, from living life to the fullest? *That’s* what it’s all about, right? Not the Hokey Pokey – life to the fullest. What would that look like for you -“life to the fullest”?

Considering our current economic situation, maybe for some of you ‘life to the fullest’ would be financial security. Is *that* what it’s all about – money? Job security, financial freedom? Maybe for you, ‘life to the fullest’ would mean another kind of freedom: freedom from guilt about the past, freedom from worrying about the future. What’s life *really* all about? Is it just “Working for the man every night and day”? Being a “good” person, however you define that? Helping other people? Is that what it’s all about?

Well, I’m gonna tell you what it’s all about. *Today* is what it’s *really* all about. Easter. Easter is what it’s all about because Easter is all about life. It’s *not* all about the bunny. In fact, it’s not about the bunny at all. It’s about Easter because Easter is Resurrection Day.

The resurrection is recorded in all four of the accounts of Jesus' life in the Bible, the gospels. Today we’re going to hear John’s account of that first Easter morning, that first resurrection day. John 20:1-18. Okay, let me be clear: This is not just a familiar old Bible story that we read every Easter and then back in the box it goes until next year. The resurrection wasn’t only significant

for Mary and Peter and John. The resurrection still means something today. The resurrection reminds us that God can do anything. Some of you need to be reminded of that today. So let me say it again: God can do anything. The tomb was empty because Jesus had been raised from the dead. Not removed, not resuscitated. Resurrected. And not only was Jesus resurrected, He was, Himself, the resurrection. Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life." If you read the Bible you will see that, whenever Jesus came on the scene, resurrections occurred, right then and there. Everywhere Jesus went, dead things came back to life. Blind eyes could suddenly see. Deaf ears could hear. Tax collectors offered refunds. Prostitutes prayed. Lame men stood up and walked. And, oh yes, dead men were alive again. Remember Lazarus?? God can do anything. If God could raise Jesus from the dead, He can resurrect whatever is dead in your life. Whatever. If Jesus could make blind people see and deaf people hear and dead men walk, He can resurrect whatever is dead in your life.

God can do anything. And what God specializes in doing more than anything else is life. Life from death. And not just ho-hum life. Life to the fullest. That's what Jesus came to bring. *That's* what it's all about. Listen: Jesus did not come to earth and live, suffer, die, and rise again so you could be religious. It's not about religion. The religious people were the ones Jesus was usually in trouble with. The religious people were the ones who crucified Him. What Jesus offers is not religion. What Jesus offers is life.

Jesus said it Himself: John 10:10: "I have come that they may have life and have it to the full." Jesus came to give His followers life: Life to the fullest: abundant life, overflowing life, more and better life than you could ever imagine. The Amplified Bible: "I came that they might *have and enjoy life...*" *This* is why Jesus came, *this* is why God raised Jesus from the dead: So that those who follow Him could have and enjoy life, a rich and satisfying life, a life full of meaning and purpose and significance. *That's* what it's all about: Life to the fullest. The Bible calls this kind of life that Jesus brings "eternal life."

Now, maybe at one time or another you memorized John 3:16. If you were to do a little man-on-the-street survey, you'd probably find that most people think that "eternal life" is going to heaven when you die. And it *is* that. But it is so much more than that. In fact, Jesus Himself defined 'eternal life.' The night before His crucifixion, as He prayed to God, His Father, Jesus said this: John 17:3: "Now this is eternal life: *that they may know You*, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent." Eternal life is not just going to heaven when you die. Eternal life is *knowing* God *now*. And not just knowing *about* God – actually *knowing* God, *experiencing* God, living every day in a relationship with God. *That's* life to the fullest. *That's* what it's all about. Listen: Jesus is not just a get-out-of-hell-free card. What Jesus really offers is an invitation to live-life-to-the-fullest. And let me be clear: That invitation is not to join a religion. It is an invitation to live in a personal relationship with God through Jesus. Knowing God in this way is what it's all about. Eternal life is knowing God *now*. 'Life to the fullest' is life lived in a relationship with God *now*.

There was a time in my life when I had no idea what this meant. I had never heard of the idea that a person could have a relationship with God. I had no idea how that was even possible, or what it would look like if it *were* possible. Fear God? Okay, I got that. Worship God? Yes. Study about God. Yes. But live in a relationship with God? What would that look like?

That's what this message series is about. Over these next three weeks, we're going to be talking about some of the qualities of the 'life-to-the-fullest' enjoyed by those who believe Jesus was raised from the dead and who live their lives as His followers. What this eternal-kind-of-life that Jesus offers is like.

So today here's my question: Got Life? With Jesus, you don't have to wait even a few more minutes, let alone a few more years, to live your dream life. With Jesus, you can have the Good Life *now*. I don't mean the Good Life as in having a nice home, a good job, great kids, enough money. Lots of people live 'the Good Life' but that doesn't mean they've *got* life. If living the Good Life was what it's all about – looking good, feeling good, having good stuff – then Hollywood would be the happiest place on earth. But it's not. Because the Good Life is *not* what it's all about. There's something better. That's what Jesus' resurrection makes available to those who believe. Not the Good Life. A Better Life. Life to the fullest.

The Better Life is a chance to start again. A whole new shot at life. Anybody got anything they'd like to do over in their life? This is your chance. That's what Resurrection Day is all about. God can do anything, and one of the anythings God can do is let you take a do-over. God can resurrect your marriage. He can. How do I know? I've seen Him do it. Multiple times. God can put new life in your career, no matter how it looks to you. You can have a chance to start over in your relationships with your kids or your parents or your siblings.

Now, you all look pretty alive to me. But I know that some of you are not, not really. Some of you have dead hearts, dead dreams, dead relationships, dead hopes, a dead plan. I don't mean dying or sick. I mean dead. Ding-dong the witch is dead. That kind of dead. Well, it's Resurrection Day. All that is in you, in your life, that is dead, hopeless, irreversible, can be alive again. Got Jesus? This 'life to the fullest' is not about religious behavior. It's about a relationship with God through Jesus. God can resurrect *you* – He can resurrect all that is dead in your life. Maybe you feel like you have messed up so badly in your life that any hopes, any chances you had for real life, real happiness, real joy, are dead. Nobody's fault but your own, you know that. You dance to the music, you gotta pay the piper. That's how life works, right? You get what you deserve. And you've got it. Guilt over the past. Worries about the future. Not much of any meaning or significance in the present.

Or maybe you're living the Good Life, but inside there is this emptiness. You're exhausted by all the demands of maintaining the Good Life and you feel empty inside. You know that getting more and accomplishing more is not really more. In fact, more feels like less. The Better Life that Jesus offers is about fullness, not emptiness. Not fullness as in a full schedule, a full stomach, or a full shopping bag. Fullness as in a relationship with God that fills your life with meaning. I don't mean acknowledging God to be God. I don't mean believing in God. I don't mean practicing a religion. I did all those things for many years. Religion didn't give me life. Jesus is not the founder of a religion.

Jesus came to bring life – life to the fullest. And this life is found in knowing God. In having a relationship with God. And it's a personal relationship. When Mary encounters Jesus in the garden, she recognizes Him when He calls her by her name. "Mary." Can you imagine the joy she must have felt at that moment, after believing with all her broken heart that the One who had

changed her life was dead and gone. Can you imagine how she must have felt to find that He was truly alive? And that He showed Himself personally to her and called her by name?

My friends, this isn't just something that happened 1,960 some years ago that is written down so we can read about it. This still happens. God still reveals Himself to people personally. God still calls men and women by name personally – because Jesus is alive. And He calls us to life: a living relationship with the living God every day of our lives.

Now, you may be wondering, as I did, “How does a relationship with God work?” First of all, you have to believe that Jesus is who He said He was and that He is alive because God raised Him from the dead. The first step to take is to say three simple things that will change your life forever if you mean them when you say them: Sorry, Thank You, and Please.

“God, I’m sorry for my sins, the stuff I’ve done and do that I know is not how you want me to live. Thank You that You sent Jesus to die for me and my sins, and give me forgiveness. Please come into my life and bring me that ‘life to the fullest’ you promised.” If you’ve never prayed a prayer like that and really meant it, let today be the day. Let today be your Resurrection Day.

But maybe you’re where I was. Raised in church, I think I always believed that Jesus had died for the sins of the world. But it was never personal, for me. It was in my head but not in my heart. To have a relationship, you’ve got to get to know God. You’ve got to spend some time with God. To do that, you need two things: the Bible and other Christ-followers. You need to read the Bible, which is God’s Word to you, it’s how God speaks to you; and pray, which is you speaking with God and then listening as He speaks to you. And spend time with other Christ-followers who are a bit further along in their relationship with God than you are. A LIFE Group is a great way to do all these things: Learn the Bible, learn to pray, and learn from other Christ-followers.

Maybe you already have a relationship with God. Maybe at some point in your life you committed to living as a follower of Jesus, but that relationship has grown stale, or distant, or is not as significant a part of your life as it once was. It’s Resurrection Day. Make a fresh commitment and start again with God. Say “yes” to that ‘life to the fullest’ invitation Jesus offers you today.

But maybe you have a great relationship with God that is vital and vibrant and growing. That’s great! Now what you need to do is what Jesus told Mary to do: *Go and tell*. Go and tell others that Jesus is alive, and that having a relationship with Him has changed your life. Help others who are just beginning to learn how to do life with God. Lead a LIFE Group. Serve in a ministry. *This* is what it’s all about, my friends. Resurrection Day. The tomb is empty. Jesus is alive. And He wants each and every one of you to have LIFE: life to the fullest, more and better life than you can imagine. A life of meaning and purpose and significance. A life of abundance, not lack. A life of forgiveness, not guilt. A life of peace and not fear or anxiety. A life of relationship with God, not loneliness and isolation.

Now. Today. It’s Resurrection Day. And *that’s* what it’s all about. Got Life?