

**These Windows Can Speak**  
**Part 3: Jesus Christ, the Prince of Life**  
**In Honour of Ernie and Marjorie Wanless**  
**Text: Luke 11:8**  
**Preached by Bruce D. Ervin**  
**25 July 2010**

There comes a time in each of our lives when a major decision must be made. Perhaps it has to do with marriage or vocation or children. There are major decisions that we must make. And maybe there's no clear-cut best choice. Each option has advantages and disadvantages. One time when I was wrestling with such a decision, a friend advised me to go with the option that was the most life-giving. Which option will bring the most life to you and to those around you? That was her question, and it was and is a very good question. Especially for people who follow Jesus, it's a good question. Because, you see, Jesus came into this world that we might have life, and have it abundantly (John 10:10). Jesus is the *Prince* of Life. To follow him, to accept him as the Lord of your life who rules in your heart, is to open yourself to all that life has to offer: all of its beauty and mystery, all of its craziness and pain, but especially, all of its love and joy!

Jesus Christ is the Prince of Life. In him the fullness of Life is pleased to dwell. It is Life that we will celebrate today as we reflect on the first of three windows that depict scenes in the life of Jesus.

The windows in question are on the west wall of the Sanctuary. The one in the middle, which depicts Jesus the Good Shepherd, was placed there by Dewitt and Mildred Davis. We'll reflect on the Davis window next week. This week and two weeks from now we'll focus on the other two scenes from Jesus' life; gifts of Ernie and Marjorie Wanless. Wanlesses and Davises were all long-time members of Knox United Church. And their shared generosity has given us rich images of life. Moving from south to north, we have the birth of new life, a life of caring for others, and the triumph of life over death.

So let's focus for a moment on the first Wanless window, the one depicting Mary and Joseph and the new-born Jesus; the birth of new life. Feel free to turn around and take a good, long look at that window. And listen to these words from John's gospel upon which the window is based: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth" (John 1:1;14).

As I've reflected on this window, three things have come to me about life as revealed in the life of Jesus. Life as we know it is *enfleshed*, life in its fullness comes with *persistence*, and *life rules* even over death.

Life as we know it is enfleshed. This wisdom lies at the heart of the person and work of Jesus Christ. In him "the Word became *flesh* and dwelt among us," says John. "In him, the whole fullness of deity dwells *bodily*," says the author of Colossians (2:9). Jesus brings abundant life, he came to show us the *fullness* of life, and he did so in *bodily form*. That should tell us something.

The fullness of life is not found by *escaping* our bodies and living as disembodied souls in the sweet by and by; no, the fullness of life is found in bodily form. Herein lies a fundamental difference between the Judeo-Christian tradition and a less incarnational faith such as Hinduism. The Hindus think that there's something ultimately evil or at least highly undesirable about being trapped in these bodies amidst all of the contingencies of history. So their hope is to finally leave our bodies and leave history behind. But biblical faith says, "No! The essence of life is found not by abandoning our bodies and abandoning history; no, the essence of life is found as embodied souls in the *midst* of history. Again, the words of Colossians: the fullness of deity – which is to say, the fullness of life – was pleased to dwell bodily here, on earth, in the midst of human and natural history.

This is the point that Martin Luther made in his characteristic earthy way when he said (and I'm paraphrasing), "If you want to fully understand the Incarnation [that is to say, the enfleshment of God in Jesus] if you want to fully understand the Incarnation, then you have to smell Jesus' dirty diaper." "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us."

Life as we know it is enfleshed, and life in its fullness comes with *persistence*. If you want to experience abundant life, you have to keep working at it, and pushing for it, and not just sitting back and expecting that everything is going to somehow be given to you. Of course, there *are* some things that are given to us. Life is ultimately a gift and we receive it. And yes, those who *wait* upon the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings as eagles (Isaiah 40:31). Patiently waiting is also part of receiving and experiencing the fullness of life. There's a time to be patient, and a time to be persistent.

This is Jesus' point in today's Gospel lesson: we pray and wait patiently for God to answer our prayers, but we pray with persistence. Jesus teaches his disciples how to pray by teaching them to be persistent: *give us* each day our daily bread, *forgive us* our sins, *save us* from the time of trial. Yes, when you pray, first *honour* God and *praise* God, but then don't be shy about asking for what you really need. And *keep* asking; be *persistent*. Jesus goes on to tell the story of the man who suddenly had to offer hospitality to a friend, but he had nothing in the house. So he went to a neighbour who wasn't inclined to help him at all. But because the guy was so persistent, the neighbour finally gave him what he needed; if for no other reason than to get the first guy to go away! If you want to experience the fullness of life, you have to be persistent.

Perhaps this was a favourite theme of Jesus', because he brings it up again in his story about the poor widow who kept bugging the judge for justice (Luke 18:1-5). And clearly Jesus admired the woman who pushed through the crowd in order to touch the fringe of his garment and be healed (Matthew 9:20-22), or the men who tore a hole in the roof and lowered their sick friend into the house where Jesus was so that he too could be healed (Mark 2:3-12; Luke 5:17-26). Jesus praised the persistent: those who keep asking tough and irritating questions at meetings; those who speak out in the corridors of power for justice; those keep coming in prayer to the throne of grace saying, "God, heal us; God,

heal the world.” It wouldn’t surprise me if some day an ancient and previously unknown copy of the Beatitudes is found (see Matthew 5:1-12) and it says, “Blessed are those who are a pain in the butt.” Persistence is part of faithfulness! Sometimes you have to speak-up for your needs and your wishes; sometimes you have to give voice to your hopes and your dreams.

One thinks of William Wilberforce: elected to the British Parliament in 1780, converted to evangelical Christianity in 1785, and as a result of that conversion, a life-long advocate of social reform. In 1787 he was lobbied by a group of abolitionist. They wanted him to use his position in Parliament to advocate for the abolition of the slave trade. Because they were so persistent with Wilberforce, he in turn became a persistent voice, a prophetic voice, in Parliament. For 26 years he pushed for the abolition of the slave trade: losing vote after vote, suffering from dreadful criticism at the hands of his opponents. Until finally, in 1807, Parliament passed the Slave Trade Act, and the slave trade was abolished in the British Empire; and with it British participation in the dreadful middle passage, when children of God from the continent of Africa were packed literally like sardines into the hold of a ship. Persistence had paid off; but Wilberforce wasn’t done. He wanted *slavery* itself to be abolished. Not just the *slave trade*, but *slavery itself*. So first as a member of Parliament and then as a private citizen, he pushed hard for 26 *more* years. On July 26, 1833, Wilberforce learned of government concessions which would enable the passage of legislation abolishing slavery in the British Empire. Three days later, Wilberforce died. One month later, the House of Lords passed the Slavery Abolition Act.

52 years of persistence. And in the midst of that, Wilberforce found the meaning of his life, and he brought *new* life to the enslaved masses. Life in its fullness comes with persistence.

Of course, life comes also with patience. You don’t survive 52 years as a persistent social reformer without also having great patience. Otherwise you go crazy. One thinks of Joseph and Mary in the Wanless window. They never would’ve made it to Bethlehem and to Jesus’ birth without the patience of Mary and the persistence of Joseph. Mary, who patiently trusted that somehow she was going to give birth to the Saviour of the world: without a husband, without an instruction manual, and in the end without even a home. Joseph, who *fiercely* persevered. Even when he wanted to abandon Mary, he persevered. Plodding along from Nazareth to Bethlehem, he persevered. When no one would provide them a safe place where the baby could be born, he persevered. And Jesus said, “Because of our perseverance, God will give us whatever we need” (Luke 11:8).

I wonder where he got that from? I suspect that Jesus learned as much from Joseph as he did from Mary. “Because of our perseverance, God will give us whatever we need.” Not necessarily what we *want*. Not everything that we *ask for*. And not according to *our* plans or *our* time frame. But God will give us what we truly *need*: in God’s own way and in God’s own time. What God asks of us is that we hang in there. What God asks of us is that we keep on *pushing* for justice and righteousness, for faith and hope, for love and life. In word and in

deed, in prayer and in prophetic action, we keep on pushing for what the world truly needs. Life in its fullness comes with persistence.

And life in its fullness is so persistent that life rules over death. Jesus Christ is the Prince of Life. Jesus Christ is the Prince of Peace, the Judicator of Justice and the Lord of Life! The nations of this earth act with injustice and rain down death on this planet, but Jesus Christ is the Ruler of *all* nations. He is the head of every ruler and authority. Through his death and resurrection he disarmed the rulers and authorities; he made a public example of them and triumphed over them! (Colossians 2:15). The nations cannot ultimately thwart his will because he is the *Ruler* of the nations.

And what he says to the nations of the world, and to the Church, and to us, is this: "Choose life." As Moses told the Israelites on the east bank of the Jordan (Deuteronomy 30:19), so Jesus tells us, "Choose life!" He says, "I have brought you life and now I invite you to *choose* life and to *live* your life to the *fullest*. If you do that, and if you encourage people and communities and nations to do that, then the victory of life that I declared in principle on Easter morn will become fact through the practices of religious institutions and the policies of the nations."

If you want to know what life is all about, then you'd better start living it here, now, today! God's life-giving Word is enfleshed in Jesus, and the author of Colossians says, "You have come to fullness *in* him" (Colossians 2:10). You have to claim it, right now, where you live. You have to claim it, right now, just as you are. You have to claim it, right now, with all of the passion that you can muster. Be bold, be strong. Jesus Christ has conquered death. Who are we to do anything else but to live life fully, completely, abundantly?! Amen.