

Abundant Life During a Pandemic

Psalm 23; John 10:1-10

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By Dr. David B. Freeman, Pastor
Weatherly Heights Baptist Church
And with Dr. Neil Lamb, HudsonAlpha

Dr. Wayne Flynt, retired history professor at Auburn University and an Alabama prophet, has been a widower for two months after a 58-year marriage to the love of his life. He wrote a moving piece for AL.com this week about an encounter he had with a flock of geese. He was on his daily two-mile walk around a secluded lake. He was pondering the loss of his wife, Dartie, the isolation, the separation from his beloved Sunday School class and church. It also happened to be the anniversary of the death of his dear friend, Harper Lee. He was feeling pretty low.

The papa goose and mamma goose were on the lake with five awkward, newly born goslings. Suddenly papa goose led them out of the water and directly toward Dr. Flynt. He and papa goose did an eye stare down until the goose was satisfied his little family was safe. Dr. Flynt just watched. He says he was mesmerized as he watched this family of geese. He called the experience an epiphany, a manifestation of divine presence. He concludes the article with this:

Perhaps God only appears to us when we are prepared to recognize him/her. And perhaps isolation from each other is the time in our busy lives when we are most capable of understanding an epiphany when it happens. (April 29, 2020)

When I read the text from John 10, the question that came to mind was this, “How can we experience ‘abundant life’ during a pandemic?” The isolation. The separation from our beloved Sunday School classes and church. The loss of life as we knew it. The grief we feel. But what if Wayne Flynt is right. That God comes to us when we are prepared to recognize God. And this current experience is making us all sensitive to an epiphany. Abundant life is not having more things. It is not going more places. Abundant life is having a center out of which we can live at a time like this. Abundant life is having deep spiritual resources we can draw upon. So I say let us look for God these days—in a family of geese, in the faces of your

friends on Zoom, in the beauty of your spring garden, in the helpful actions of the front-line workers, and in the souls of those with whom you share the isolation. The thieves come to steal, kill, and destroy. Jesus came to bring life, abundant life, even during a pandemic.

I am delighted to welcome Dr. Neil Lamb back to Weatherly. He was our Williams lecturer two years ago and led very engaging weekend on the topic, "People of Faith Negotiating a Genomically Driven World." He is Vice President for Educational Outreach and Faculty Investigator at Huntsville's HudsonAlpha Institute for Biotechnology. He is also a committed United Methodist layman.

Neil, welcome back to Weatherly. First, share with us how you and your family are doing during this difficult time. I know your family had a wedding a couple of weeks ago. I suspect that was a bit of a challenge.

Neil, I believe HudsonAlpha is a feather in Huntsville's cap. We are fortunate to have HudsonAlpha and you in Huntsville. Is work related to the COVID-19 virus being done at HudsonAlpha? If so, can you tell us about it?

Neil, I think most of us find the isolation and loss of normalcy to be challenging. Jesus said he came to bring abundant life. Share with us your thoughts about abundant life during a time like this?

One more question, Neil. Do you have some recommendations you can share with our Weatherly family that can help us negotiate this pandemic?

Dr. Neil Lamb, thank you very much for zooming in with us today. We pray that you and your family remain well during this pandemic. And thank you for the work you and HudsonAlpha are doing.

Abundant life. Yes, even during a pandemic. Let us look for God today. Let us look for an epiphany. Let us live out of our center and draw upon the resources of our faith. Amen. Be safe. Be well.