

May 17, 2026—The Seventh Sunday of Easter
The Rev. James Wyatt

Eternal Life

I have a sort of strange relationship with the Gospel of John. In some ways, I feel like I understood it better forty years ago than I do now. When I was a new Christian, with my eyes freshly opened to the presence and love of God, the Gospel of John repeatedly reached out and grabbed me and showed me the glory I was looking for. But then I went and took a lot of New Testament classes in college, where I spent a lot of time with the other three gospels, and then I went to seminary, and eventually I just found John ... kind of confusing. Because it's so different from the other three gospels, because it paints such a different picture of Jesus, I had a harder and harder time making sense out of it. And I've been struggling with that over the last ten years as I've been preaching again, often wishing that I could find my way back to the sort of naïve, wide-eyed openness of 18-year-old James.

Well, we spent a lot of time with the Gospel of John through Lent and Easter this year, and I had a moment this spring, I think it was while I was writing my sermon for Easter Sunday, actually, where I felt like I had finally figured out what the Gospel of John is all about. I think it is more or less summed up here in this passage we read this morning: "And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." That's it. That's the heart of John's Gospel.

The thing is, I think it's hard for us to really hear those words. Let me read them again: "This is eternal life, that they may know you ... and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." Notice that it doesn't say, "This is how they get eternal life," or "This is the way to eternal life." And it doesn't say anything about believing or having faith or confessing or repenting or obeying or any of the other things we think we're supposed to do. It doesn't say "to know this or that about God," not "to believe the right things about God," but to know God, like you know your best friend—a God who loves you and cherishes you and desires your full flourishing. That, just that, is eternal life.

Because—I've said this before, but the word "eternal" here does not mean unending or everlasting. Orthodox Christian philosopher David Bentley Hart translates it as "life in the Age," with a capital A so you know it's special. Mary Coloe, an Australian nun and new Testament scholar, uses the phrase "eternity life" to emphasize that it's not about quantity, it's about quality. It's not just about life after death, it's about the eternity life we can experience here and now. A couple of weeks ago, when we read part of the Good Shepherd discourse in John chapter 10, we came across the phrase, "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly." (John 10:10) Over and over again, Jesus in the Gospel of John describes himself as the source of life—abundant life: "I am the Bread of Life." (John 6:35) "I am the Resurrection and the Life." (John 11:25) "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life." (John 14:6) "I am the True Vine ... [and] those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit." (John 15:1, 5) And "unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain, but if it dies it bears much fruit." (John 12:24)

To know God, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom God has sent is to have abundant life, eternity life, life that is More with a capital M so you know it's special. To know God is to bear abundant fruit, to flourish on the vine, to experience new growth blossoming out of the depths of death and despair. To know God, the true God who loves the whole cosmos and who cherishes *you*, is to grow into your true self, to become more and more the person you were meant to be, made in the image of God and in the likeness of Christ. And to know God is to be knit together in community into the Body of Christ.

When I manage to reclaim some of that naïve, wide-eyed openness of my 18-year-old self as I read the Gospel of John now, it's a bit like being reunited with an old friend, and falling right back into our old, easy familiarity. Because what John did for me the first time I read it was introduce me to this God who loves and cherishes me, who desires my full flourishing and

wants me to have abundant life, this God who is real and can be known—who *wants* to be known—this God who offers us More, with a capital M, right here and now.

May we who seek to know God and have been united into the Body of Christ live a flourishing and abundant life, bearing the fruit of the Holy Spirit for the life of the world.

Amen.