

“FAITH AND FILM: III – IN CHRIST, WE HAVE ABUNDANT LIFE”

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July 26, 2015

2 Timothy 1:1-14

Matthew 6:25-34

They were two late middle-aged men. One was a white, irascible, playboy, multi-millionaire. The other a black, hard-working, family-oriented car mechanic. Complete strangers, until fate and cancer brought them together. Their names – Edward Cole and Carter Chambers.

Edward and Carter are the main characters in the wonderful movie “The Bucket List.” Released in 2007, the movie is about a journey they make together. Both of them are diagnosed with very advanced stages of cancer about the same time. They end up as roommates together in a hospital which Edward Cole happens to own. Their relationship gets off to a bit of a rocky start, because Edward is totally self-centered and self-absorbed, and really wants no parts of sharing anything with anybody, especially a small hospital room with a dying man whom he doesn’t know.

But disease has a way of leveling the playing field – and so it did with these two men. And something interesting happened along the way. Take a look and see:

Film clip – scene in the movie where Edward finds a wadded up piece of yellow paper on the floor and opens it up, discovering Carter’s “bucket list”

Those men couldn’t have been more different, could they? The things on Edward’s list were experiential, and on Carter’s, largely relational. Edward’s adventures would be surface, Carter’s deep. But somehow, they worked it out, made their list, and off they went. They took off in Edward’s private jet, and the adventure began, to experience life to its fullest, and live their dreams.

Those two men had that decision thrust upon them by bad medical diagnoses. They knew their time was short, and it was now or never, to experience the things in life that would fill them with joy and meaning.

Isn’t it sad that it came to that point? While this movie is fun and exciting, and it’s wonderful to see what happened to them, still – isn’t it sad that they came to a point where they had to rush to have experiences of abundant living in the last days of their lives? I have a feeling that, like most people, they kept putting things off, saying, “Oh, I’ll get to that someday. I’ll make that trip, I’ll have that

experience, I'll mend that relationship, I'll read that book . . . someday" . . . only someday came way late in the game.

Now, I'm not saying that life is a never-ending series of awesome adventures that take your breath away – no – but what I am saying is this: that life, on-going, day-to-day life is meant to be abundant. Remember the words of Jesus: "I came that they might have life, and have it more abundantly." (John 10:10)

Trouble is, I think, that we forget that, and life too often becomes day-in, day-out, do the same thing, go to work, come home from work, get the chores done, plop down in front of the TV or computer, then go to bed, and get up the next day and do the same thing. Now, you may have a variation on that, but you get what I mean. Too easily, our lives fall into mundane, day-to-day sameness – not exactly what you would call abundance.

Mind you, I don't think any of us say to ourselves, "I'm going to live a mundane life," I think it just happens, we get into a routine, and it's not exactly abundant living. Oh, there are hints of it here and there, but we could do better.

So, this morning, I want to invite all of us to embrace more abundant living with a sort-of Christian bucket list – not to be completed near the end of our days – but to be lived now. The things on this list, by the way, are things that Jesus did all the days of his journey on this earth, and things we can do as well.

One is to notice the beauty all around you, and take some time to explore it. Jesus did that all the time. Search the gospels and you'll see him enjoying time on the lake – probably relishing quiet times when the surface of the water was so smooth it looked like a mirror, but also enjoying the rush of being on the water when the waves were so high they rocked the boat back and forth.

And we read about him walking by himself or with his disciples in the mountains – no doubt stopping along the way to look at a beautiful flower growing out of a crack in a rock, or spotting a sheep or goat along the way.

And think about those forty days and forty nights he spent in the desert. Surely there were times when he picked up a handful of sand and watched, mesmerized, as it slipped through his fingers onto the ground.

Not to mention countless sunrises and sunsets, flowers, trees and animals of all kinds. Jesus loved God's creation and he loved spending time in it and he actually took the time to look at it, really look at it, and enjoy it, and remember that it was God's gift in his life.

When's the last time you did that? Well, I know some of you have done it this summer while on vacation, because I've seen your incredible nature pictures on Facebook – ocean waves, glacier grandeur, sunsets, mountain lakes. But how about you? When is the last time you marveled at the creation around you – actually looked up at the stars in the sky? Stopped and looked, really looked at a blooming

hydrangea bush or a rose unfolding? Took time to sit and watch the birds at your bird feeder? Took a walk or a hike?

Friends, we are surrounded by such beauty, every single day of our lives, and it is possible, sadly, to miss it every single day, if we're not careful. So perhaps your life's bucket list needs to say, "Stop every day to appreciate God's glorious creation."

So look at that flower, enjoy the smell of freshly mown grass, savor the taste of a crab cake with Old Bay, corn on the cob dripping with butter, or a wonderful, fresh juicy peach. Look at some body of water, walk around your neighborhood or in a park – well, you get the idea – just pay attention and spend some time today and every day noticing all of the good things God has placed in your life. Doing that, intentionally, every day will be abundant living.

Surely another path to abundance is spending time with people you care about. Jesus did that all the time as well. He spent time with his family, he spent time with close friends, he spent time with his disciples, he spent time with strangers. He took time for all of them, nothing was more important than that he be present with people – fully present. I daresay Jesus never had those moments that we've all had – when you're with someone, but you know they're not really with you – their mind is on something or someone else. Jesus was always fully present with people – and enjoyed his time with them.

How many times lately have you wished you had more time to be with your family and friends? How many times have other things cropped up – work, your schedule, your chores, just stuff – and gotten in the way of time you would like to have spent with people you care about? That happens – it happens to all of us. I keep a running list of people I want to see – and it's sad how, sometimes week after week, I'll have a name still on the list, because I couldn't get to see them.

I think Jesus would encourage us to make time with those we love a priority in our lives. Don't wait until later, until everything's done, and your schedule's complete. I think, actually, that Jesus would say that being with those you care about should be part of our planned schedules, not something that we simply fit in when we can.

How are you doing with spending good time with those you care about? When's the last time your whole family had a meal together? When's the last time you talked to your best friend? When's the last time you went for a walk with someone, or out for a meal with them, or talked on the phone with them? When's the last time you hugged or kissed someone or told them that you loved them?

Do you remember what God thought when He was creating humanity – how after He created Adam, He didn't want him to be alone, so He created Eve. God created us to be in relationship with others – it's part of His plan for our abundant life. Let's include on our bucket list today and everyday – cherishing our relationships and nurturing them every day.

There are so many other things that our Christian bucket list for abundant living could include, but this morning, I'm just going to suggest one more, and it is this: Challenge yourself. Challenge yourself.

Surely Jesus is a wonderful example of that. At every turn, it seems he faced a challenge and took it on. And at every turn, he encouraged his disciples to do the same. He challenged them to give up what they were doing to follow him. He challenged them to stand up in the face of opposition. He challenged them to face their fears. He helped them to do things they never thought they could do. And it meant abundant living for them all.

I don't think God meant for our lives to be boring, or safe, for that matter. I think God created us to have moments when our pulse races, we sweat a little, and we nervously try something new. I think it brings God great joy when we stretch ourselves beyond where we think we can go, and do things we think we can't do.

Look at the Biblical witness to that. Think of Moses. Poor old Moses was just doing his job, up in the hills one day, when a bush near him started burning, and all of a sudden, God was calling on him to lead His people. Don't you know Moses' pulse was racing, he was sweating, and he was scared to death. But he did it, and it not only changed his life, it changed the world.

Or Mary. She was just a young girl making plans for her wedding, when an angel came to call, and changed her life. No doubt, her pulse raced, and she was scared to death, but she said yes, and did it anyway, and life changed forever because of it.

But it doesn't have to be that big, you know? Think of that little boy who went to join the crowd on a mountain one day to hear Jesus speak. He left his house clutching the sack in which his mother had put some food. Then, a few hours later, he's there in the crowd, when suddenly it's time for dinner, and nobody has any food, and Jesus asks the disciples how these thousands of people were to be fed. Someone turned to that little boy, saw his sack of food, and I would imagine that little boy's pulse raced, and he sweated a little bit, but he gave it up and Jesus took it and blessed it and broke it and gave it out – and thousands of people were fed. It was miraculous, it was abundant, and it happened, because a little boy took a big leap of faith.

Challenge yourself. Step out of your comfort zone. Do something that scares you a little bit, because you're not sure you can do it. Do something that makes your pulse race.

Maybe, for you, that could mean spending an overnight in the Rotating Homeless Shelter this winter? Or maybe, for you, it might be serving as a mentor at Thomson Estates Elementary School?

Or how about singing in the choir? Oh, I know you're not Pavarotti or even close, but believe me, offer yourself, and Steve and Sharon will take care of you, it will work.

Could you help with the youth group, work on the tech team, volunteer for Meals on Wheels? Maybe your challenge will be to take a stand on an issue that touches your heart, or giving generously to a cause that needs your funds.

Only you know what challenges you, what stirs your soul, what quickens your pulse. I think Jesus would say, "Do it." Don't let your days go by in endless monotony, never stretching yourself, never trying to be all that you could be.

Edward Cole and Carter Chambers went on a journey of a lifetime and tackled their bucket list. It was some adventure, and they had experiences that made their pulses race, and stirred their hearts. They knew when it was time to stop, and go back home, and so they did. They knew their time was short, and so it was.

At the end of the movie, Carter dies first. Edward speaks at his funeral. Watch and see what he has to say:

Film clip – Edward speaks at Carter's funeral

Isn't that wonderful, what Carter said about Edward – that when he died, "his eyes were closed, but his heart was open"? That's abundant living, friends, your heart wide open.

Don't wait, like the guys in the movie did, til your back is up against the wall to live abundantly. Do it now, do it today. Let your heart be wide open today. Do something today, and then tomorrow, and the next day, and the next.

Jesus said, "I have come that you might have life, and have it more abundantly." Accept that gift from Him, and do it – today! May it be so.

Amen.