



*A Message from Mark!*

## **The Wow Factor!**

25 April 2010 - Easter 4  
Scripture ~ John 10:22-30

The promise of our Christ does not end there. He assures us that none of his flock will perish. ***I give them [my sheep] eternal life. They shall never perish.*** Here we have that vivid word “perish” again. Flowers wilt and perish, fruits perish, blue Ulysses butterflies perish, leaping red kangaroos perish, our personalities can be corrupted and perish, our bodies perish. But not the soul-being of those who Christ has already transferred to eternal life: the flock of Christ shall not perish.

He goes on. ***No one shall steal them out of my hand.***

We are always at risk. We are at risk from the robbers around us who tempt us, give false promises and seek to corrupt us. We are also at risk from the negative, cynical, destructive influences around us in the jungle of this twenty first century - the bears and wolves that harass the flock. With the passing of the centuries, the life of faith has not grown any easier than it was in the Roman Empire. It was a precarious adventure then, it is so now.

As long as we entrust ourselves to the God of Christ, nothing shall snatch us from him. What matters in times of crises is not our grasp on the Lord but his grasp on us; not our belief in him but his in us. It is by grace that we will make it, not our own skill or cleverness. When we think we can go it alone, then we are in trouble. But with Christ we will make it. Knowing that his is the stronger grasp is a part of the **Wow!**

See me now? You are looking at one surfing Merino who is afraid of himself but not of his shepherd. As one member of the flock said way back in the first century: ***“I know the one in whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to look after that which I have committed to him until the great day”*** of graduation arrives. [2 Tim 1:12]

**Wow!**

**Amen!! Thanks be to God!!**

*This sermon was preached by Rev Mark J Dunn at  
St John's Uniting Church*

*Cnr Mt Alexander Road and Buckley Street Essendon Victoria 3040  
Home/Work Ph: 9375 1065 Mob: 0409 009 443 Email: mark@dunn.id.au*

*www.stjohnsessenon.org.au*

*Enquiries about the Christian faith are always welcome.*

**COLLECT** *Most loving God, please stir that part of our brain where hopes are renovated and visions created, that we may have a faith that is open to wherever you wish to take us. In the name of Christ Jesus, the good shepherd of our lucky flock. Amen!*

***I give them [my sheep] eternal life. They shall never perish.  
No one shall steal them out of my hand. [John: 10: 28]***

Sheep. Stupid creatures! We citizens of the twenty first century don't take kindly to being likened to sheep. In Australia in earlier generations, we had ridden economically on the sheep's back, but that was where our respect ended. The wool cheque was welcome but not a preacher who makes a comparison between us and those woolly imbeciles. So, I'll not be so odious as to make the comparison; I'll leave that to you.

Actually, if you've ever had a pet lamb, you will know it is easy to become quite attached to them; rather like the shepherds of Jesus' day who lived with them, knew them individually, and would risk their life to save them. It was a natural thing for Jesus, like the writer of the most famous Psalm in the Bible, to see the men and women who followed him as a new flock of sheep which he'd gathered together.

To this flock, looking small and vulnerable among the powerful ***“wolves and bears”*** of the Roman Empire, he made a promise:

***I give them [my sheep] eternal life. They shall never perish.  
No one shall steal them out of my hand.***

What does eternal life mean? Sadly, some people get the idea that it just means us living on forever.

Let me say, that if that is all it means, I'm out of here. I do not want to be trapped in the limitations of this life, as I now have it, forever. If eternal life means just going on, and on, and on, then I don't want it. A permanent death, oblivion, sounds like a good option for me. Just continuing ad infinitum seems an intolerable prospect and I could feel common ground with the agnostic poet who wrote:

*Don't bother me now, don't bother me never,  
I want to be dead for ever and ever.*

But the God of Jesus of Nazareth offered something infinitely better. Eternal life is the fullest possible life, life of the limitless new age, the kind of life humanity has dreamed about. It is awesome life, unlimited life; unbounded in every way. No walls, no barriers, nothing to stop us going further. It has new horizons, new depths, new heights; new joy and awe and love beyond anything we thought possible. I get close to defining it when I say: "**Wow!**" Eternal life is wow life! Life with an exclamation mark. Not life with a comma or a tired semi-colon; not life with a question mark or life in parenthesis. Certainly not life with a full stop. It is exclamation stuff: **Wow!**

The timeless dimension, immortality, is just one of the many facets of eternal life. To be liberated from this time and space, is merely one of the wonders of its amazing abundance. Of course this is important. I am not trying to minimise this element. When I see a child wither and die from say, leukaemia, I find great comfort and encouragement that her being is not terminated; as a person she has opportunity to still be and grow and love. Eternal life includes this facet of unlimited future.

But please, don't limit your vision of eternal life to this one element. It is only one among a kaleidoscope of opportunities. Eternal life is gloriously expansive, opportunity beyond measure, a level of bliss and growth that no number of earthly words can possibly describe.

The next important thing I want to try and express is that this "**wow life**" begins now. The disciples already have commenced eternal life. To trust Jesus and His God is to begin that life now. Today we *taste and see that the Lord is good*. Those who believe have *already passed from death to life*.

As Paul says: *If anyone is in Christ there is new creation, everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new.* [2 Cor 5:17]

**Caught as we are in the limitations of the here and now, eternal life is only a small foretaste, but it is the real thing. Our bodies and minds limit us, the social and political structures of the world limit us, but in Christ Jesus we begin to explore the unlimited dimension --- that for which we were created and redeemed. We begin to experience the awesome "WOW!" which flows around us from the Holy Heart of all things.**

When I think upon my own little life, scratchy and patchy though it still is; when I remember how the dimensions altered and grew from the moment I threw my lot in with Jesus as a young teenager, I'm overwhelmed with gratitude. We're usually not aware of it coming all at once, the enlargement takes place bit by bit, and often I've been impatient, sometimes I've lost the plot, but my God, it has happened! Even to me! **Wow life!**

Eternal life is now. The next sentence I will speak is pathetically inadequate, but let me try to express eternal life this way: *It is as if with Christ at our side we're surfing the wave of eternity here in time; all around us are the limitations of time; but on that wave with Christ we're riding free on the wave of the unlimited; the wave of eternal life.*

So, I see myself as a woolly Merino, standing on the surfboard with Christ, catching a wave and getting a ride I could never get under my own ability.

The most significant joy of eternal life is love. Love, love and more love. Its no surprise that John's Gospel, which is the one that favours the words "**eternal life,**" is also the one that most forcefully speaks of the primacy of love. As does also the first Letter of John. Any person, old or young, who thinks they are surfing the wave of eternal life but is not caught up in greater love -- divine and human -- is fooling themselves. Love is the litmus test. Love of God, love of each other.

I have no doubt that love is a far more important ingredient of eternal life than is the fact of surviving death. Without it, surviving death would be a nightmare.