

Scarcity or Abundance?

Texts: Luke 10:1-20; Isaiah 66:10-16; Psalm 66: 1-12

Do you live with a sense of abundance, or “scarcity”?

When you think about life,

is your working assumption that there is enough – more than enough –

or is it that you're always struggling along

with too little of what you really need –

of things and money

but also what you most deeply desire

recognition and security and love?

Is there never enough

or do you trust that Life will somehow

be all right in the end --

that Grace or Love or God

will provide what you most need.

That ultimately, all things shall be well...

Do you live with a sense of abundance or scarcity?

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This question – of abundance or scarcity –

Is one of the central questions that
business management expert Steven Covey
posed in the 1980s.

in his best selling book,

[The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People.](#)

The book is a thoughtful analysis

of how people become

more effective managers,

and find deeper meaning in their lives.

Readers devoured it.

One of Covey's key observations

was that we humans tend to have either

a “sense of abundance”

or a “scarcity mentality.”

Those with a scarcity mentality

think of the world as a limited size pie;

we all then compete for our slice.

It's a zero sum game.

If your slice is bigger, mine will be smaller.
We compete for material goods
but also for intangibles, like prestige or credit.

At work, for example,
Those who tend have a scarcity mentality,
assume that when someone else get credit,
they lose.

As a result, those with a scarcity mentality
have a hard time genuinely rejoicing
when others do well.
In order to protect themselves.
they secretly hope that others will fail,

The alternative, says Covey,
is living from a sense of "abundance."
Managers with an abundance mentality
believe the pie can grow,
they see possibilities beyond what is,
they encourage workers
to fully use their talents to explore fresh options,
and they rejoice when others succeed.

Your success does not mean my demise.
There is room for everyone,
with credit enough to share.
We can reach for win/win.

Managers who live
with an "abundance mentality," said Covey,
are generous with praise,
and their people have greater productivity.

Covey considered the cultivation
of an "abundance mentality"
central to business success,
and to fulfilling relationships
among family and friends.

When we live less from fear,
and more imbued with what is possible,
we flourish.

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Abundance is the watchword
in all of our scriptures today, also.

It's layered through every one of our Bible readings.
Again and again comes the message:
live with a sense of abundance and hope;
it makes all the difference.

In Luke's story, suddenly Jesus
is no longer going out from town to town
by himself,
or even with that initial group of 12 disciples.

Now "seventy others," more followers,
are being sent out by Jesus "in pairs"
going "to every town and place where [Jesus] himself intended to go."
It's nearing the end of Jesus' own ministry,
he's headed towards Jerusalem,
but that does not mean the end of his story.. Instead, he'll send 70 others.

The road won't be easy- this is no fairytale.
Jesus acknowledges that the 70
will go out "like sheep among wolves."
Some listeners will reject them.
They'll feel as if they've had to walk over hot coals or fight with snakes.

Already in some towns where Jesus has spent
lots of time, like Capernaum,
there have been people who've seen
abundantly the power of love to heal,
but they've still chosen to focus
only on their scarcity,
on what they're convinced
they still need and don't have.

"Woe to them," Jesus says, meaning
"I have such great sorrow for them."
Not because God judges them -
God only wishes fullness for everyone.
But grief because these who have
seen abundant love
have condemned themselves
to see life through only the lens of scarcity.

Yes, our lives are not fairytales.
Yes, there are hardships.
But these are never the end of the story.
So the 70 gather their courage and go out,
and find - to their own astonishment -
that they can feed the hungry of soul,

bring peace where there was heartache,
 provide healing words and hope.
 It works! The 70 come back rejoicing.
 "The harvest is plentiful."

Where we could reasonably anticipate
 a tale ebbing to its sad conclusion –
 Jesus realizing he'll never make it
 to all the towns he's hoped –
 instead there is an abundance –
 a seventy fold increase
 of those sharing the good news,
 and an abundance of those receiving it.

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In today's Psalm we also read
 of the abundance of God's many gifts to us.
 "Come and see," we said,
 "what God has done,
 how awesome his works on our behalf...
 He has preserved our lives and kept our feet from slipping."
 Verse 11 says, "we went through fire and water,
 but you brought us to a place of abundance."

And in the Old Testament,
 the ancient prophet Isaiah
 writes to the people of Israel
 at their low point,
 their time of deep discouragement,
 as they languish in Babylon in exile,
 roused by invaders
 from their beloved home in Jerusalem,
 their capital,
 where their holy temple had stood,
 now just a ruin of stones.

And the people of Israel hear these words of abundant comfort:

*Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her,
 all you who love her,
 ...all you who mourn over her.
 For you will nurse and be satisfied
 at her comforting breasts;
 you will drink deeply*

*and delight in her overflowing abundance.
 For this is what the Lord says:
 "I will extend peace to Jerusalem like a river,
 and the wealth of nations like a flooding stream;
 you will nurse and be carried on her arm
 and dandled on her knees.
 As a mother comforts her child,
 so I will comfort you...
 you will flourish like grass..."*

Abundance ahead for Jerusalem,
 when it seemed to lie in ruins.
 A God who will comfort us,
 as a mother comforts her child,
 and feeds the little one,
 nursing of the mother's abundance.

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For a few days this past week,
 I was on Cape Cod,
 relishing a fresh sense of God's abundance. Bob and I kayaked on the
 morning of July 4th,
 timing our trip so we'd be out at high tide,
 when the water is plentiful in the marshes. And what a difference there was,
 if the water was running deep and strong
 in the channels among the marsh grasses,
 or if, as the tide washed back out to sea,
 we were dipping our paddles in only small shallow puddles,
 barely skimming the sand below,
 the once abundant marsh waters swiftly becoming tidal flats.

So imagine in the hot, barren lands
 of the Middle East,
 amidst all their sand, where water is scarce,
 what Isaiah's words conveyed
 to that parched people,
 so thirsty for water.

For them to hear that their beloved Jerusalem
 would receive peace flowing as bountifully
 as a river,
 that it would again have wealth
 as abundant as a stream
 that rises beyond its banks to flood
 and leave behind rich nutrients,

so their sand becomes soil,
so grasses can flourish,
rather than wither in drought
under the heat of day.

Imagine, in a land of dire poverty,
where weak mothers starve to feed
their children,
with babies who rarely live past infancy,
how marvelous it would be, as a mother,
to be able to supply your ravenous crying
child with overflowing milk,
that the babe may drink deeply,
and be comforted.

Imagine, a mother so overjoyed
to be strong enough
to carry the baby in her arms,
to dandle him on her knees,
playfully and with delight.

Powerful abundance, rather than scarcity!

That is what I plan for you, says God.
That I hold you, like a precious child,
and dandle you on my knee.
That you eat until you are satisfied.
That you drink until you have no more thirst. My abundance, given for you.

Abundance, not as a path that's always easy.
But abundance despite hardship.
Exodus after slavery.
Return, after exile.
Harvest, after drought.
A message received, after sometimes being rejected.
Sheep sent among wolves, but love victorious in the end.
An abundance from trusting, it will be all right, and going forth in that trust.

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What does abundance feel like to you?

Have there been times when you have feasted on abundant food,
so plentiful that you could not believe it?
Do you recall the tastes and scents,
the joy of knowing there as more than enough, all around you?

For me the early memories

I have of an abundant meal are breakfasts
at my grandmother's home in Evanston, Illinois.
We grandchildren would arise and make our way down the big staircase
to the dining room,
where the table would be set and waiting for all of our cousins, aunts and
uncles.

There were little glasses of orange juice
–not plastic cups, but real glass, with small flowers etched on them.

There were slices of cantaloupe or little bowls of sliced bananas or strawberries.

We were offered cold cereal or oatmeal – always there was oatmeal –
and delicious coffee cake warm from the oven.

We had real milk to pour on the cereal, a wonder for me.
At home, to save money,
my family always used powdered milk –
skim and thin and sometimes not yet chilled when we received it.
But at my grandmother's home,
there was cold whole milk,
delivered to her door each day in large glass half gallons,
kept cool in the insulated box outside her back door.
Beads of water perspired on the milk bottles, testifying to the coolness.
And to me, it tasted like cream. I was in heaven.

But part of the abundance of those breakfasts
had nothing to do with what we were eating –
though that was delicious.

There was an abundance because of
all the extended family members
who gathered around the table,
a growing throng as the morning wore on
and more people emerged
from their bedrooms.
By being invited to that table,
for a week every year in the summer,
I got a sense of being part of a larger family.
I lingered as the grownups did,
over their coffee,
and heard their stories of how their years
had been
and what they hoped the future might hold.

I learned about my roots,

deep in the Iowa farm soil or Tennessee hills.

I gained a sense of who I was or could be,
from those long, sumptuous breakfasts.

Where have you glimpsed abundance?

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Sometimes,

memories of family gathered around the table

are more painful than joyous;

we shudder at the recollections,

and our adult journey

is learning to create new tables

around which we can gather –

to find new family of our own making,

perhaps even here in this church.

At some family tables we've been programmed

towards a scarcity mentality,

because we had to fight and scrap

for each moment of attention,

or just to be left alone.

All of us need a place at the table.

God's intent is to provide it.

For every single one of us.

To invite us all to the feast.

To provide for us an abundant love,

so we can begin to trust

that there will be enough.

Not only for us, but for all.

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Jesus, throughout his ministry,

was always reaching out to people

who were thought to be beyond some line – Jesus ignored the lines and
included everyone.

He spent time with foreigners

when "good" Jews stuck to themselves; Jesus spent time with women,

when pious men stayed away;

Jesus sought out his religious rivals

and the ostensible enemies of the Jews –

the Samaritans;

Jesus laid his hands on many who were tainted, and would render him
impure –

Jesus touched dead people,
bleeding women,
and lepers.

And that's not all. Jesus ate with everyone,
and he ate a lot –
dinners were a favorite time for him to sit
and learn and teach,
maybe not so different
from my grandmother's breakfast table,
where I sat and learned and was taught,
as the meal was shared.

Jesus ate with religious dignitaries,
and with hated tax collectors.
He ate inside Peter's house,
served by Peter's mother,
and he offered bread and fish
to gatherings of 5000 on a hillside.

Jesus feasted and drank at the wedding in Cana,
and he told parables about
great feasts and bountiful harvests.

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It is for this reason –
this constant lesson of abundant meals –
that here at King's Chapel
we offer communion fully and freely,
with no exceptions.

Communion is Jesus' Supper,
modeled on his Last supper,
and Jesus invites everyone.

Some religious traditions
require people to believe a certain way first;
or purify themselves by fasting or confessing;
or bar the door to whole groups of people
because of their past,
even a broken marriage.

But here we serve Jesus' feast to everybody,
no questions asked.

All of us are broken,
and healing comes from being included again.

Some religions think that you can
only have communion

after you understand what it's all about,
after you've taken certain classes,
or have reached a certain age,
or professed certain words
to show your understanding,
but we let anyone of any age and any background
receive communion.
Most of us will never fully comprehend
the abundance of this gift.
It's beyond our human grasp.

So we come, like the first group
who sat around a table with Jesus
– the motley group of disciples
who still hadn't understood
what Jesus had been talking about for months,
though they received his private tutoring;
the disciples who still squabbled for power
among themselves;
the disciples who later that very night
would snore when Jesus asked them
to stay awake and keep him company;
the disciples who would try to violently
slash with swords at the Roman soldiers
who came to arrest Jesus,
despite all Jesus' words on peace;
the disciples, who would run far away,
to be out of earshot
when the hammer rang out
nailing Jesus to the cross.

This motley group – these failed disciples –
were the ones to whom Jesus first served
bread and wine,
to whom he said,
“Do this in remembrance of me.”

Gather together around a table like this,
invite others to join you like this,
share bread and drink wine like this,
and remember me.

Do this, and know I am still with you.
Eat this bread, drink this wine,
and know God's abundant love for you.

Then take it to others,
invite more to the feast,
in all the towns and villages

to which I had intended to go.
Make the table large enough for all.
For this is feast of unending love,
offered to everyone.
Offered to you.

Come, for you are invited,
to this abundance.
Live in it, revel in it.
It's for you.