

“Out of Scarcity, Abundance”

In an article entitled, “Enough is Enough”
The Old Testament Scholar, Walter Bruggeman
Discusses the gap between the rich and poor.

He says we live in a world where the difference
Between scarcity and abundance
Grows wider every day.

What’s peculiar, he writes, is that the rich . . .
The ones with the abundance
Work from a perspective of scarcity.

There’s limited resources.

Not only hold on what you have
Put more and more aside just in case
Even if it means some do without.

On the other hand, the poor
The ones suffering from scarcity
See life from a viewpoint of abundance.

They see there is enough to go around
As long as everyone takes only what they need.

Not only will there be enough
There will be more than enough
Even left over.

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From a Biblical perspective
God is all about abundance.

In the creation story,

“Out of Scarcity, Abundance”

God establishes abundance from nothing

Calls forth plants and animals to increase and multiply
And promises to provide for every need.

Later, in the desert experience, this God of abundance
Heard the cry of the Israelites
And provided daily manna.

What had appeared to be a place of scarcity
Through God’s faithful generosity
It became a garden of abundance.

And even in death, the place of starkest scarcity
The God of abundance provides even there
By offering life eternal.

God is in the business of abundance.

Our following Scripture Lesson is another example
Of how God moves from scarcity to abundance.

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Just before today’s Scripture Lesson
Jesus learns King Herod had John the Baptist beheaded.

It affected him deeply.

And he needed some time alone with his disciples.

Jesus and his disciples went off by themselves
To a solitary place to mourn John’s death.

They went by boat to escape the crowds.

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But the people saw where Jesus was going
And followed along the shore.
So that by the time Jesus and the disciples
Reached their destination
The crowds met them there.

What was Jesus to do?

People needed him.

Needed him to heal their every ill
To wash away their loneliness
To give them hope.

And so, Jesus did what he always had done
His heart moved to see such earnest faith
And he reached out and healed them.

And the crowds were lifted up and out . . .
Out of that desert place . . .
Out of their loneliness, their isolation . . .
Their brokenness . . .

And Jesus laid them down in green pastures,
Led them beside still waters,
And restored their souls.

And time stood still
As Jesus spoke
As he healed
As he cared for them.

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And before anyone knew it
The sun slipped down beneath the hills.

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The disciples came to Jesus.

“Jesus, we’re out in the middle of nowhere
It’s getting dark . . . send them away!
Let them find a McDonald’s or a Burger King
In one of the surrounding villages.”

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And how did Jesus respond?

Go somewhere? They don’t need to go anywhere.
You give them something to eat!

In the Gospel of Mark’s account of the story
One of the disciples said:

“But Jesus, it would take 8 months wages
To buy enough bread for them.”

“We have only 5 loaves and 2 fish.”

And Jesus said, “Give them to me.”

And taking the bread and fish,
Jesus sat everybody down
And said something like this:

“Folks, no worries, it’s all good
We’re going have ourselves a picnic!”

And as it got dark

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The people gathered close to the campfire,
And broke out singing, “kum ba ya.”

Everyone ate and was full.
And there were left-overs to boot.

5000 men, not counting women and children were fed.

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A miracle? Absolutely.

How did he do it?
Did he produce the food out of thin air? Possibly.

Do I believe he could have? Yes!

But did he?

My feeling is . . . probably not.

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If one looks carefully at the passage,
Nowhere does it state food miraculously appeared.

The passage simply says
That Jesus distributed the 5 loaves and 2 fish
To the disciples
Who then passed it out.

And there was more food left
Than when they first started.

That’s what we know.

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The real point to the story, in my opinion

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Is not whether Jesus produced food out of thin air.

The real point is that when people
Come into the presence of Jesus
Good things begin to happen.

A desert becomes a garden.
A snack becomes a feast.

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MAYBE . . . just maybe,

As the people witnessed Jesus
Sharing this pitifully small amount of food
Their own hearts filled with generosity.

They started reaching into their own pockets
Sharing the food they brought for themselves.

And so what started out a small handful of food
Became a huge feast
As people pitched in to share with one another.

This takes away from the miracle here.

The true miracle here is the way
The love of Jesus transforms hearts and changes lives!

The message is clear
With the love of Jesus
Out of scarcity comes abundance!

In the presence of Jesus
Our world becomes a place for picnics.

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And the bounty comes from the generosity of the heart.

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To be honest,

This mentality of scarcity limits God’s abundance

Often churches view life this way.

“We can’t do that!”

“Where will the resources come from?”

Sometimes churches get locked into a conservation mode

That prevents her from fully experiencing

And sharing God’s abundant life.

We forget the church is a vehicle that moves

Between God’s generosity and the world’s needs.

So when we hold back

When we hang on to what we have

When we’re reluctant to step out in faith . . .

The blessings of God remain unavailable

For us and for our neighbor.

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So what does this all mean for us today?

Well, let’s consider West Richmond for a moment.

Let’s ask the question . . .

Do we work with a mentality of scarcity?

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Fearful we won't have enough

A bit anxious whether we can balance the budget.

Are we reluctant to involve ourselves in anything

Because it might mean having to spend money?

I'm asking . . . I haven't been here long enough to know.

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Or do we work in the mentality of abundance?

Are we looking ahead to see

How we might live generously

With what God has blessed us?

How we might share those blessings with others?

Are we looking for new opportunities

To step forward in faith to what God is calling us to?

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The disciples were followers of Christ

Who worked within a mentality of scarcity.

“Send them away, Jesus

We can't care for all these people.”

But had they trust in the God of abundance

They would have said, “hey, we got this.”

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Today after worship

I meet with a group of church folk

I call an envisioning group.

I selected these people

“Out of Scarcity, Abundance”

To help envision what the church
Might look like in five years

People invested in this congregation
Who want to make it the best it can be.

I want us to ask the question
Where we see ourselves in the future.

I would venture to say
That those who view things in an attitude of scarcity
The future is not so bright.

Their question might be, “how do we survive?”

But those whose perspective is that of abundance
The question “how do we thrive?”

If God can feed 10,000 men, women, and children
On five loaves and two fish

Just think what God can do at West Richmond.

I know we might be tempted to say
“Yeabut, Jesus.”

But don’t be surprised if Jesus comes back with
“Yeabutnothing!”

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Brothers and sisters, the call is there.

The resources are there.

“Out of Scarcity, Abundance”

It may look like it's not enough

But remember we serve a God of abundance!

What are we waiting for?

“Hey, Jesus, we got this!”