Springfield Presbyterian Church

July 28th, 2024

 Abundance in Scarcity

1. A concept I struggle with…

As we hear this morning’s reading, we hear about God’s

abundance in scarcity. While we often think of the text where Jesus feeds the 5,000 – this is a less known one, but still very much a mirror of what is to come. The central theme is indeed abundance – this sense that in a world that can feel scarce, we have a God who enters in with miraculous mysteries beyond comprehension. This is our God, who not only feeds our souls, but feeds our bodies – nourishing us mind, body, and spirit.

 Yet, we can all live in a life of scarcity, or believed scarcity. We all have our certain ‘thing’ that we can never have enough of. For some people, it’s shoes, others collect stamps or trading cards, or maybe it is the next best thing on the IT market. And, at the base, there’s nothing wrong with this – there is nothing sinful about it. I believe God has given us hobbies and interests and things to enjoy, but at some point in which we turn a corner when it becomes too much.

 Let me share with you a funny, vulnerable, and honest observation in my life. If you’ve seen my office, you’ll see books everywhere. Now, this is not highly unusual for a pastor. Pastors love books. It’s a thing. We never want to be scarce of knowledge, or of the ability to dig into some niche that might serve at the pulpit or pastoral care. I could defend this all day long, but there’s a point at which people often say, “I have enough books” and…I don’t understand those people.

 But, but – I’m trying to do better. I’m starting to get rid of books and donate them. I’m asking as I pick up every book, “Will this serve me, or could it bless someone else more?” It’s similar to Marie Kondo’s “does this item spark joy” – but I needed to put it in different language for myself. And it’s a process – like when we went down to Christmas in July in Sykesville this past Thursday, I went in the bookstore and I want you all to know…I did not buy another book. Again, this isn’t a pat on the back – I honestly believe my husband Bryan, Donna, or a few of you would have my head if I did – so there’s the helpful part of accountability there. But I’m trying to find the balance, as many of us do – in what is enough.

 Now, why is this relevant? It’s relevant because, again, as humans, we have the capacity and survival mechanism to collect things. Whether consciously or unconsciously, we’re often worried that we might not have enough. Yes, that’s books for me in this instance, but I wonder what it is for you? What is the thing that you collect to create a fortress of emotional safety? And I’ll say – there’s a spectrum here – some people are great at getting rid of things, some people aren’t. But maybe one of the gleanings we can learn from the Word this morning is that if a small amount of food was able to feed so many people, perhaps what we have is enough. Not in a guilty or shame-filled way – but what we have is enough and that can give us ease. So, as I work on my book collection, I’m curious where you are – is what you have enough? Are there things you have that might bless others? Abundance is meant to be shared.

1. Bigger Scarcity

I wish I could tell you that in starting to do this practice, I have now mastered this sense of comfort in abundance – this sense of deep knowledge that all will be okay and that I will have any provision I need. Intellectually – I believe it – I believe that God has always and will always provide. We’ve seen it in Scripture, and I know I’ve felt it in my life. I’ve been in circumstances where I’ve looked up and said, “Spirit, please give me the words…” and the Spirit has always delivered. Yet, emotionally and practically – I am wired like any other human. I fear scarcity; I wonder if I’m planning for retirement (though, in truth, does any minister ever really retire?), do I have a rainy day fund that would cover us? And then you can go into the dangerous ‘what if’s’ – what if social security benefits cut out, what if health care prices rise, what if my insurance doesn’t cover some issue. That’s a spiral – and it’s easy to spiral into scarcity. I do not share this to simply tell you of my anxieties – but because I sincerely believe I am not alone in having these moments. This is deeply human. Our human ancestors were built for survival.

 Yet God said, “I have come to give you life – life in abundance.” It wasn’t, “I have come to give you life and hope that you can make it through.” No, the covenant, the promise, is much more hopeful. We hear it reflected in Ephesians, when Paul remarks, “God is at work within us and through him – he is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine.” Our perceptions of abundance, our perceptions of scarcity, come into a different lens when we see and hear the hopeful message that God’s working in and through us, and all that we wish, hope, or dream of is beyond our human comprehension.

 And for those of us who can be skeptical, myself included, I wonder – is this news just too good to be true? I love what I hear in Scripture, again, I’ve felt these moments in my own life, but when I look at the world around me – I can be a skeptic. Where is God’s new Kingdom? As I hear our story from second Kings – I love the image, this food doesn’t look like it’s going to feed too many people – but God declares that there will be an abundance, there will be food left over. But where is that happening around here?

 It actually is happening around here…we just have to be careful to listen. As many of you know, our church is involved in a collective ministry with Wesley Freedom called Community Table, otherwise known as ‘Feed My Sheep.’ Our team goes and buys food and cooks it in the commercial kitchen. Places like Panera and Martins donate often heaps of food to the cause. When people come in, our team serves them and often sits with them and hears their stories. I have often heard of food left over, of having so much food that they don’t know what to do with it. As our team has shared stories with me of those they’ve met, I’ve heard of incredible stories from those being fed of their gratitude. They are grateful for this ministry and they are grateful for their lives. Even those who are living in tent communities, seem to have genuine spirits of gratitude. What they have is enough, though they certainly deserve a lot more, and their stories can inform our stories – their attitudes can inform ours.

 So, we have to change our mindset. When we focus on scarcity, we can become bitter or indifferent, perhaps dangerously apathetic. Let me be clear and also say – there will be times where we will grieve – where enough doesn’t feel like enough or truly isn’t enough in the moment. There is space to mourn, but it cannot be our constant mindset. We cut ourselves off from the mystery and the mindset of God’s miracles taking place right within our own lives. We also shut ourselves off from the hopefulness found in our Word today. It is not God who is denying us abundance, it is ourselves. The news that often seems too good to be true is…indeed, actually true. The gifts of God are beyond our comprehension, they are beyond anything we could ask for or imagine. As we begin to see this, things start to change.

 When we live in a state of abundance – we always have enough. We not only have enough books…but we also have enough in all arenas in our lives. We plan wisely, we discern prayerfully, certainly – but at the end of the day, we firmly believe that God does and will provide. Putting ourselves in the mindset of gratitude and abundance not only does us spiritual good, but it helps our general well-being. We are nicer people to be around at a party. We are healthier – blood pressure goes down, the heart rate eases up, and our laughter gives us and others joy.

 So, it’s summertime – so there might be some space on your calendar. Maybe you want to join me in a few new practices. Join me in asking whether those material items in front of us can bless someone else. Join me in the daily, if not moment-by-moment practice of turning our minds from ones of scarcity to abundance. Join me, because in doing so, I believe we will live lives where God’s Kingdom will come and in these actions, we can be active participants in that joyful and joy-filled Kingdom here on earth today. Alleluia and amen.