

What is enough? How do we know?

Psalm 107:1-9, 43; Luke 12:13-21

Thoreau once said, "I make myself rich by making my wants few." I make myself rich by making my wants few. The Bible has a multitude of stories and teachings around this very principle. For example, when the Israelites were journeying to The Promised Land after being liberated from slavery in Egypt, they didn't have enough supplies and were quite hungry. They cried out to God through Moses, longing and wondering, *why would God do this to us?* In that cry, God then provided them with manna – which is bread – and honey. Enough to satisfy them. To satisfy their great thirst and their hunger. There was one rule, though: only take what you can eat in this moment. Of course, people were scared, having walked through and not sure what their next meal would be. So they, as you might predict, took a little extra. In the morning, all of the extra food that they had taken that they didn't eat was rotten and filled with worms. The question remains for us today: What is enough? And how do we know that we have enough?

The parable that Jesus told the crowd is another lesson in figuring out what is enough. He shares that a rich man produced an abundance of crops, so much so that it wouldn't fit in the barns. He wondered to himself, what should I do? He made the choice to tear down the barns that already existed, in order to make bigger barns. That way, he could store all of the grain that had come this year. God's response was that his life was going to be demanded that very night, and he would be leaving behind all that was in the barns and wondered, who will then inherit and enjoy the abundance?

Now often, this parable leads people to the conclusion that we all need to give away all of our possessions. The thing about parables is that they are not so cut-and-dry, nor are they black and white. Kind of like the story of Mary and Martha that we heard a few

weeks ago. Where Mary was sitting at the feet of Jesus and Martha was busy hosting. Was one better than the other? Did it have to be an either-or, or were *both* important? In this particular parable, what if the choice isn't *keep it all or give it all away*? A parable is similar to a riddle, and perhaps we are focusing on the wrong thing. For instance, the rich man could have left his barns that he had, filled them up, and then given away the rest of his grain that didn't fit. Sharing the abundance with others truly is a blessing, and in the end, a lot less work. The choice to make bigger barns can be seen as a way to distract oneself. Sometimes, when we do this, we think we're being rich, and yet we aren't. God teaches us in the practice of Sabbath, as demonstrated in the 1st Creation story of Genesis, that after working hard and creating the world and all the people...after six days of hard work, God looked around and said, "It is good." And God rested on the seventh day. When is enough, enough? Did the rich fool actually in the end act out of scarcity, rather than out of his abundance when he made the choice to make his barns bigger? I was reading a story in a book about a woman with two small children who had separated from her husband, and she was really worried about the future and how she would provide for her family. She was scared, wondering where her next meal would come from. So when she came across some money, she went out and stored up as much food as she could, filled her freezer so that they would have a meal. And she thought that would bring her a sense of peace and calm and safety. But what it did was simply remind her of how scared she was.

Wayne Muller, in his book entitled *Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal and Delight in our Busy Lives*, writes: "The woman makes a crucial distinction between abundance, which is a fearful response to scarcity, and sufficiency, which invokes a sense of satisfaction and well-being."¹ Sufficiency is that moment when we have enough, when we realize that we have enough. He goes on to write that "in the Hebrew tradition, petitionary prayer – which is the kind of prayer where we ask God for things – is discouraged on the day of Sabbath. Instead, we are to focus our heart not on what we need, but rather on what we already have.

¹ Wayne Muller, **Sabbath; Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in our Busy Lives**, (New York: Bantam Books, 1999), p. 201.

When we are attentive and awake, a single breath can fill us to overflowing. The touch of a loved one. A particular angle of the sunlight can bring delight to our hearts. The simple gesture of someone's hand resting on our own. The taste of honey; a strain of a melody can give birth to quiet satisfaction. A sense of enough."²

The psalmist is affirming this practice of focusing our hearts on what we have. The section of Psalm 107 that we read today speaks to the hardship of the desert wandering, an allusion to Israel's wilderness years, which I've mentioned before. From which God delivered the people when they cried out in distress. The first verse contains much gratitude: "Oh give thanks to the Lord, for the Lord is good. For God's steadfast love endures forever." God delivered the people who were in distress. God showed them the path, and God satisfied their thirst and hunger with good things.

We're all being invited today to reflect and take stock of what we have. God is calling us through Jesus and this parable to turn our attention back to God. The question we need to answer today is: What do we place at the center of our lives? The reality is that whatever is at the center will get the bulk of our care and attention. If we surround ourselves, as the rich fool did, with the grain at the center of our lives, we won't have room for family, friends, for sharing in the abundance that he had.

What does it mean to be rich towards God? I believe it means that when we have God in our lives, when God is at the center of our lives, we already have all that we need. Hear the words of the psalmist again: "Oh give thanks to the Lord, for the Lord is good, and God's steadfast love endures forever." If, as it said in the scripture, that our life does not exist in our possessions, that is not our life. What does your life consist of? What are the things that are distracting you from putting God at the center? And when you find yourself with an abundance – whether it is possessions or something else – what will you do with it? Going back to Thoreau: "I make myself rich by making my wants few." How will you make your wants few so that your abundance isn't lived out from a place of scarcity? So that your love comes from God at the center in your lives? How will you share in the abundance this day?

² Wayne Muller, p. 202.