

Share Abundantly

Psalm 36

This is Gratitude Sunday. Gratitude Sunday is a time for us to offer thanks, and also to express our gratitude for all that God has given to us, and also to express our gratitude to one another for all that each and every one of us does. The theme for the Gratitude Team program year this year is called *Hidden Abundance Revealed: Shared With All, Answering God's Call*.

Several weeks ago, we explored the story of the loaves and fishes, when Jesus asked the disciples to feed the thousands of people who had gathered. The disciples lacked faith that there would be enough food. All they had and all that they were able to gather in that moment were five loaves of bread and two fish. But at the end of the story, something miraculous happened, to the point where there were twelve baskets of leftovers. It was truly a miracle, but not in a way one might think. God didn't shower bread from heaven or have fish jump out of the sea. The miracle was that people were moved. So moved that they shared what they also had brought with each other.

The story of Stone Soup, which Sylvia had brilliantly adapted to the Spritely community – and this is Spritely here, for those of you who haven't met Spritely yet – is a modern version of the miracle of the loaves and fishes. The three travelers came upon a village that was struggling. Who had begun to distrust strangers and even their neighbours. People kept to themselves and didn't help one another in this village. But then a miracle happened. When just one person who had faith – or in this case, the three monks – thought that things could be different. The miracle happened when they uncovered the hidden abundance that had been there all along.

This leaves us with an age-old conflict. As humans, we often get to a point where we think to ourselves, "Why am I trying to include others? I can do this myself." Or: "I don't need any help. I will just go it alone because I can get it done faster." As people of faith, we can go the complete opposite direction by thinking, "It's okay. God will provide all that we need. We just need to trust in God." And what we are left with is an either *I'll do it*, or *God does it*. But what Jesus is teaching us and what God is teaching us today is that we are called to do this together. It's about balance. It's about working with God.

I originally chose Psalm 36 today to pair it with the story of the loaves and fishes because of the statement that the psalmist said, "For we give thanks for God's steadfast love." It's a beautiful sentiment that God's steadfast love is always with us. It is the promise that no matter how much we act like humans and doubt and make mistakes, God loves us. When we have faith in God, we will feast on the abundance of God's house, and God will drink from the river that will delight our souls. And as it says in verse 9 of the psalm: "For with you is the fountain of life. In your light, we see light." When the monks first came to that village, they did not see light. They did not see life as they were all hiding in their homes. They didn't see people thriving or joining

together for a common purpose. What transformed the village was not only faith and God, but the people. It takes both God and the people to uncover the abundance that is hidden in plain sight. The village people were like those spoken of at the beginning of psalm 36, when it said, “Transgression speaks to the wicked deep in their hearts, for there is no fear of God before their eyes. For they flatter themselves in their own eyes. For iniquity cannot be found out and hated. The words of their mouths are mischief and deceit. They have ceased to act wisely and do good. They are set on a way that is not good, and they do not reject evil.”

Often when we first hear these statements, it leaves us with this uneasy feeling. Are we like that? Will God judge us for what we think we are doing right, which really isn’t right? The reality is that we all have these tendencies. None of us are perfect and none of us always do the right thing. And in our more vulnerable moments – in our moments when we are truly honest with ourselves. When we fear that we will be rejected and punished for our sins, we recognize and start to believe that we are beyond redemption and that we fear that we will never be in the shelter of God’s wings because of what we have done.

The psalmist today writes: “All people may take refuge in the shadow of God’s wings. God saves humans and animals alike. All that is required is for us to seek God. To seek forgiveness.” We, like the villagers, need to open ourselves up to the Spirit among us. The Spirit of Sharing, the Spirit of Generosity, The Spirit of Abundance and the Spirit of Redemption and Steadfast Love. What inspires people to step forward in volunteering and in leadership? What inspires people to share their gifts or their food with others? I believe it is knowing that what we share and what we do will make a difference in the world. Will make a difference in someone’s life. When we have a clear call and when we have a clear commitment, people will become engaged. People will come forward like the villagers did in the story, and they will do the work that God has called us to do.

So, in order for Robertson-Wesley to answer God’s call, we need every person – *every* person who walks through this door – to give of themselves in all the small ways that you do that help to share God’s steadfast love in this world. The Spirit is alive and well when a person reaches out to another. The Spirit is alive and well when we help someone in need with food and shelter. The Spirit is alive and well when we sit with somebody in their time of sadness, and also in their times of joy. The Spirit is alive and well when we share of ourselves. So, I implore you to not diminish what it is that you have to share. Sometimes, what is hidden from us is how we participate and how our gifts actually make a difference in the world. Sometimes we can’t see it.

When I was in Youth Ministry, I always loved the parable of the sowing of seeds. When I became disheartened because something didn’t work out or somebody left the group, I remember that it wasn’t just me. That I was working with God. All I had to do was sow seeds abundantly and trust that growth would happen in the way that God intended. I gotta tell you, throughout my years in ministry with youth, there were times when I felt I had lost some youth. And thirty years later, they suddenly reappear and talk about how the time in that youth group saved them.

We never have a true understanding of how our seeds or what we offer – how they will grow in time. What impact they will make on others. We need to trust in God and share what we have abundantly, and almost recklessly, with everyone. The Spirit of God is revealed in every single thing that every single one does in this world. So, how is God calling you to share the abundance that you have received this day?