

Abundance Abounds

Text:

Matthew 6:24-34

A sermon preached by

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Thanksgiving Sunday



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Matthew 6:24-34

Jesus said: “No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet God feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will God not much more clothe you—you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ For it is others who strive for all these things; and indeed your God knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kin-dom of God and God’s righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. “So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.”



I worry.

When she was nearing 20 years old I had my daughter Lindsay at the doctor for a typical health exam. He said she was doing well and he had no concerns.

I broached the subject of mortality, “You know doc, we haven’t talked recently about Lindsay’s life expectancy. When she was born the ‘experts’ admitted that they really had no idea how she

would do considering her medical conditions – they said she might live 3 months or she might live 20 years. We’re nearing 20 years now.”

He replied: “Well, she’s pretty healthy. I think at this point I’d say she has a normal life expectancy.”

I hesitated. “You mean ... ‘normal’ for someone with her condition?”

“No. I mean if the average woman lives to about 81 years old, I’m guessing maybe Lindsay will live to be something like 78.”

“And I’ll be *how* old by then!?!,” I asked.

I worry.

Yes, I worry about Lindsay. What happens after I’m not around any longer. She has an older brother and younger sister. She has family and those who love her. But I worry. Of course I worry.



A few years ago, my mom showed me her favorite photo – a black and white snapshot of her grandmother, Sarah Southwell, sitting outside in someone’s yard, in a wooden rocker with a crocheted afghan covering her lap. “I just want to live to be as old as my grandmother was – 90 years old.”

At mom’s 90th birthday party, I mentioned that she was now as old as Grandmother Southwell. “Feels good, right?”

“Well, I just want to live as long as she did – 91 years old.”

“Mom, you keep changing her age!”

She smiled.

I worry.

These days, mom's physical health is failing, she is much more frail than just 2 years ago. She turned 91 in September, she's had some heart trouble this past year, she's had several falls, and her mental capacity is slipping.



I worry.

I worry about Lydia who just dealt with surgery a few weeks ago – she's doing well thanks to the care she received, her determination to get back to full strength, held close by your prayers and God's grace. But, yes, I worry.

I worry about my grown children and my new teenage son and my small grandchildren. I worry about Hope Church and its ministries and its future. I worry about each of you.

I worry about crises that happen all over the world – I worry about Paris and Mali and New York City; I worry about al Queda and Boko Haram and ISIL; I worry about gun violence and unrepentant politicians and immigrant discrimination.

I worry about my own physical and emotional and spiritual health, about money and career and the future and retirement, about food and housing and clothing.

I worry. Don't you?

“Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ... Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today.”

I worry. I suspect Jesus worried at times. And I know you worry too.

Over and over and over again we worry about our lives. Maybe not so much these days about what we'll eat and drink and wear – though we do focus on that stuff if you pay attention to magazines and TV and social media. But we do, each of us, all of us, worry. So how can it possibly be right for Jesus to ask us – command us, really – not to worry?

Yet today's reading doesn't start with the "no worries" point. It starts with an assertion that we cannot serve two masters, both God and money. If we try, Jesus says, we'll end up loving one and hating the other. And notice that Jesus doesn't say money is evil, or money is bad, just that it makes a poor master. Actually, the word in Greek is *kurios*, often translated "lord." The lord is the one who demands and deserves your loyalty, allegiance, and devotion.

We can't give our allegiance and devotion to money because to do so is to fall into the trap of the world that lifts money to the top of it all and proclaims it the solution to a falsely created fear mechanism – scarcity. You know the myth. Despite the fact that we know God has given us all we need to survive and live and thrive, there is a worldview which says that there isn't enough to go around and that we need to gather and hoard all that we can. And that requires money, and money is hard to come by, so it only flows to the ones who deserves it, those who work hard – or, according to some, it only goes to those whom God wants it to go to.

It's the great American myth. Perhaps it's the world's myth. Always has been, maybe.

Once we believe that money can satisfy our deepest needs, then we suddenly discover that we never have enough. Money, after all, is finite. And so once we decide money grants security, then we are

ushered immediately into a world of counting, tracking, and stock piling.

So we worry. In a world where we're told that scarcity reigns, we learn to believe that there is simply never enough.

The alternative worldview that Jesus invites us into is that we consider deeper and believe more fully in our relationship with God, God who is infinite and whose love for us and all creation is infinite as well. Love operates from a different "economy" than money. When we choose to love someone, we discover that that love can flex and bend and grow. And it never operates on a fear-driven mode of scarcity – love operates on the basis of abundance, that there is always the capacity to love and to deepen that love and expand its breadth.

In fact, isn't it true that the more love you give away, the more you have? Love – including God's love for us, says Jesus – cannot be counted or hoarded or tracked or stockpiled. And when you live in this kind of relationship of love and trust, you've entered into the realm of abundance, of possibility, of contentment. Suddenly, in this world, Jesus calls it the "kin-dom of God," not worrying actually becomes an option.



Yesterday, this church was filled with people who have lots to worry about.

There were middle school youth here to help sort food donations and to re-stock the Food Bank shelves – middle schoolers with their own angst about acne and who like whom and what's the next hot video game, and sometimes it seemed like who could be the loudest. But they took their Saturday morning after a "sleepover" at our home, to fill their neighbors lives with God's abundance.

There were Food Bank volunteers who I know worry about where next month's food will come from. When 54 guests come through the door, the once filled to capacity shelves suddenly look like the cupboard is bare. I know for a fact that this hard-working team worries about money and enough hands and making sure people are cared for. And there were people here for food to help them through their month. People filled these halls, people with very little money, people with health concerns weighing down their lives, with children to feed and families to care for, with every imaginable struggle that the world can throw at them. There were people here who have every right to be anxious and worried because they, like us, live in a world where scarcity is the catchphrase and fear-mongering is prevalent. These are not "poor" people or "homeless" people or "lazy" people or "helpless" people. They were, and always will be, quite simply God's people. Just like you and me and Jesus.

One guest gave Elizabeth a gift, a small house-shaped, box of cookies (that we never saw again!) – *ignore the claims of scarcity, proclaim a message of abundance*. One little girl gave Bill a quarter, a nickel and 2 pennies – she wanted him to pass it along to help "poor people" – remember the widow's mite, he said as he handed me the \$.32 – *ignore the claims of scarcity, proclaim a message of abundance*. On my way out of Giant where I had picked up more gift cards to share with guests so they could buy a Thanksgiving turkey, I recognized a smiling young woman coming into the store to use her card after having just been at the Food Bank – *ignore the claims of scarcity, proclaim a message of abundance*.

Several of Hope's youth stayed extra time to help carry bags to people's cars and to offer smiles and joy – *ignore the claims of scarcity, proclaim a message of abundance*. There was joy among the team that they made contact again with a guest who they have not seen for several months and they discovered that she has had the double lung transplant that she had been waiting for and that

she has been recuperating – *ignore the claims of scarcity, proclaim a message of abundance.*

There was laughter and joking and prayers and hugs and hope all over this place yesterday – *ignore the claims of scarcity, proclaim a message of abundance.*

God doesn't operate from scarcity; God operates out of abundance.

In response to the worst the world has to offer, even when the world put Jesus to death, God acts out of abundance and brings about new life. God does not, in fact, keep accounts or demand payment or hoard power with which to destroy the offenders. Instead, God *resurrects* – the *ultimate* act of abundance, creating something out of nothing, drawing light from darkness, giving life to the dead.

This is the world Jesus invites us to consider – a world of abundance and generosity and new life. I watch the sparrows at the feeder in my back yard. I look at the mums growing in my side yard. I rake the leaves that fall from the trees (my *neighbor's* trees!), leaves of gold and orange and red. I look at the faces of the kindergarten kids waiting on my corner at noon waiting with their moms to climb onto the big yellow bus. It is all so fragile, yet it is all so loved by God who I trust.

“Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today.” God knows that's not easy; Jesus knows that's not easy; we all know that's not easy. But it's a real practice from which we could all benefit.



I invite you to do something with me this week as Thanksgiving Day approaches. Rather than surrounding ourselves with the images of scarcity and fear and negativity that tend to cause us to worry, gather images of abundance and life and love and let them

fill your hearts. I'm not suggesting that we ignore the bad things that happen around us, but if that's the worldview that dominates then our anxiety levels increase proportionally. If we are surrounded by images of scarcity, worry, and fear, then that's how we live out God's purpose for us – but if we capture thousands of images of their opposites: abundance, courage, and trust, just maybe we can live out God's abundance.

Look around you this week. Find those places and people and actions where you see God at work caring for the world and all that dwells in it. Actually gather those photos or drawings or sounds or tangible items that accompany the imagined. Literally surround yourself – or your Thanksgiving table even; invite others to bring things as well – with those images and moments and let the allow you to breathe and relax and know how loved and blessed you truly are.

Amen.