



10<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

July 29, 2018

Church of the Advent

### **Scarcity and Abundance**

This morning we have a tale of two kings—the first of an acclaimed and beloved king of Israel who lived in abundance, yet acted out of scarcity to create death and destruction for those around

him—and the second of a would-be king who lived in scarcity, and yet acted out of abundance to bring new life to those around him.

The first was David, King of Israel, chosen by God’s prophet Samuel when he was just a humble shepherd. Though no one expected much of the boy David, his courage and character were brought forth to save the Israelites when he killed the giant Goliath with only a slingshot and a well-aimed rock—and God’s providence. The abundance in David’s life came as he grew in age and stature to become a great warrior—a leader of men who would follow him into any battle, no matter how out-numbered by their enemies. Eventually David would become their king, guided and blessed by God beyond all possible imagining of a shepherd boy, reaching a life of abundance—a family, sons, faithful soldiers, a palace with servants, and above all, God’s protection and favor. What *more* could he possibly want?

In David’s army was a faithful soldier named Uriah, and David wanted Uriah’s wife. Seeing Bathsheba bathing across a courtyard of his palace, David wanted her for himself, and even though women were property then and had no say, there were laws against adultery. Uriah was conveniently deployed with the army so David had Bathsheba brought to him and David got her pregnant. At first David tried to cover up his sin by having Uriah brought in from the front lines to spend a night with his wife—which didn’t work thanks to Uriah’s was faithfulness to the

rite of purity while in battle. Then David sent word to his field Commander Joab (in a letter he made Uriah carry himself) to put Uriah in the thick of the fighting so that he would be killed. David used the abundant power of his Kingship to get what he wanted, eventually marrying Bathsheba after a “suitable” period of mourning for the dead Uriah as a cover for his sin. Their first child was born weak and died in infancy, leading David to recognize the limitations of his power, and repent of his sin before God. He had been given everything, and rather than see his abundance as opportunity to bless his people, he used his power as king to get *more* than he needed, killing an honorable man to get it. David had abundance, and saw scarcity.

Jesus was a different kind of king—one who lived in scarcity and saw abundance. For the years of his adult ministry, Jesus called his disciples away from their livelihoods to a life of transience on the road, not knowing where they would lay their heads each night, or where their next meal would come from. They were surrounded by what he called the *least of these*, and yet he talked continuously about the abundance of God’s mercy and love available to anyone who believed. Jesus healed the sick, cast out demons, and fed thousands of people with left overs. If there was any question about the abundance of his power, he walked on water, too.

The disciple Philip told Jesus there was *no way* they could buy enough bread to feed the extra large crowds that were following them—not even with *six months wages*. Andrew confirmed that their entire larder consisted of what a small boy carried—five barley loaves and two fish. But Jesus wasn’t worried; he just told them to sit the crowd down. And then out of scarcity came abundance; everyone ate their fill and there was enough left over to fill 12 baskets. After this experience, the people sought to take him by force to make him king, but Jesus escaped and withdrew to the mountain by himself.

What are we to make of these two stories of kingship, and of their lessons in abundance and scarcity? How can we see beyond the obvious moral: *David was bad/Jesus was good/don't be like David/be like Jesus?* In our own world where the concepts of abundance and scarcity are always relative, and we are invited into a gospel of prosperity as easily as a gospel of generosity, how then shall we live? How do we find the *right* place between hoarding our blessings while feeling like we *deserve* them, and giving away everything we have to anyone who asks without consideration of the consequences either to ourselves or to those destined to receive what we are giving?

Even the disciples stayed confused and doubtful of this new way of seeing the world that Jesus was teaching. Chosen from among people who worked as farmers and fishermen, they never expected to get rich enough to act like kings. They knew the hard life of living close to the bone in their world—though they were considerably better off than the blind, the lame, the lepers, the widows and orphans. Surely they were touched by the way Jesus moved among the strangers and outcasts that followed them around; surely they marveled at the healing and liberation they witnessed by his miraculous actions. Yet they were still creatures of their own time and experience. What did they make of one who preached of an abundance of love, seemed to care nothing for earthly comforts, one who ran away by himself to escape those who would take him by force to make him king?

Perhaps the disciples remembered the stories of David, who though he was favored by God he had messed up big time, drenching his life in sorrow and remorse for his sin as he watched the next generation of his offspring plot against, and even kill one another in conflict over who would inherit David's power and position. Kingship has its privileges, but

when fear of scarcity—of losing those privileges—overcomes gratitude for abundance, it has a very dark side.

Following Jesus means seeing the world in a radically different way. It means not only seeing abundance where the world sees scarcity, but it means defining abundance very differently from the way the world does. Those thousands of people were not fed because the loaves and fishes magically duplicated themselves in the basket like a trick in a Disney movie. They multiplied because people there on that day heard Jesus speak of the abundance of God's love, watched him offer it to everyone regardless of their station in life, and followed the sacrificial impulse to scrounge around in their pockets for small offerings that became an abundance when combined and shared with others who had little or nothing. That was the miracle. It is sacrifice, rather than hoarding, that creates abundance. That is the way of Jesus, King of Kings.

Is it hard to find a balance between scarcity and abundance that always feels right in our world, yet as Christians we have the opportunity to keep reaching for that balance, and to share the abundance of what we have found in the love of Jesus Christ with the world. We are not called to be all things to all people all the time—or to fix everyone else's problems—but we *are* called to follow the way of Jesus—to count our blessings, live in gratitude, and to scrounge around in our pockets and offer what we can towards the grand miraculous meal, where all are filled with the abundant love of God, and there are always baskets left over. Amen.