

“This Life is Enough”

Sermon delivered by Rev. Joan Javier-Duval
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Reading

David Whyte, from the book Where Many Rivers Meet

Enough. These few words are enough.
If not these words, this breath.
If not this breath, this sitting here.

This opening to the life
we have refused
again and again
until now.
Until now.

Sermon

In the last week or so, I've been feeling more tangibly the shifting of the seasons. Late autumn has truly arrived with its colder temperatures and bare trees. And now, with the time change, darkness will be more present.

It's also been apparent to me that the holiday season is approaching as our stack of mail at home has been getting heavier and heavier with the arrival of shopping catalogues. And, my email inbox has been getting fuller and fuller with ads from various online retailers.

Apparently, at least from the perspective of the market, my life isn't full enough. There is more that I must need.

This is just one message that might start to creep in as the holidays approach. The message that we don't yet have enough.

So, reflecting on the theme of abundance feels appropriate. With this shifting of the seasons as winter approaches and the calendar moves towards the holidays, we can reflect on how to notice the **true** abundance in our lives.

The question we reflect on all month is: What does it mean to be people of abundance?

The dictionary definition of abundance emphasizes a state of plenty and bounty. Abundance can be measured and quantified, and we can certainly think of abundance in material terms (and next week we'll reflect more on this aspect of the theme of abundance).

Yet, as a word that has meaning in our spiritual lives, abundance takes on a more qualitative nature.

One of the spiritual exercises of the month that comes from the Soul Matters Sharing Circle invites us to make a list of a number of different items and to rate each one based on its scarcity or abundance in our lives.¹ The list includes: access to food, access to reliable shelter, financial independence. It also includes: freedom to make decisions about how you use your time, time to volunteer, play, moments of beauty, and self-care.

This exercise makes me reflect on the less tangible qualities of my own life that are indeed present in abundance even while other things are lacking. And, in doing this exercise, I am reminded that abundance can't always be objectively measured but is more about my perspective.

When it comes down to it, abundance isn't so much about what or how much we have but how we view what is present in our lives as they are now.

As a feeling, abundance connotes security, comfort, ease, peace of mind. The Reverend Lynn Ungar defines it this way: "Abundance is a world of spaciousness where we are all invited to dwell." It is a feeling of plentifulness that engenders happiness and generosity.

¹ <https://ucmvt.org/worship/theme-based-ministry/monthly-spiritual-exercises/>

Abundance comes from believing that, as the poet Wendell Berry puts it, “what we need is here.” Maybe not what we want, or what we think we want, but what we need.

Though I’m not talking about abundance in the material sense today, I know that if you are struggling with a lack of resources, it can be challenging to feel a sense of abundance. I have also observed that having an abundance of material wealth does not directly correspond to an appreciation of what one has - materially or otherwise. Wealthy people don’t necessarily live more readily with a sense of abundance.

What we have materially is just one part of feeling a sense of abundance, and sometimes is something we have less control over. The internal sense of abundance, however, is something we can move towards with practice and intention.

But, let’s be real. There is a lot that gets in the way of feeling that sense of abundance, of recognizing that what we need is here, that there is enough.

What I’ve noticed in myself and others is how easy it can be to focus on what is lacking. My own personal fixation is usually on time and my lack of it. Not enough time for the many worthy causes I want to be involved with. Not enough time to spend with family. Not enough time to complete all the tasks and meet all the needs involved with being a minister.

And, my experience tells me that when I start focusing on those areas where I feel I am lacking, where I think there is not enough, I stop noticing what is present. I lose what Wendell Berry calls that “ancient faith” that what we need is here. Instead, I start to believe that we I need is out there, somewhere else, or that I need to be someone different than who I am to be enough.

I think this is what is behind the recently named social phenomenon, FOMO or “fear of missing out.” We crave experiences and fear missing out on some other thing that is happening that we can’t participate in. We fear missing out on an abundance of pleasure, happiness, excitement, and fulfillment that would surely come from out there - anywhere but where we are now.

A mentality of scarcity is at the root of this constant looking outward in search of abundance or a sense of enough. And, it is so easy for this to become habit.

Anthony de Mello, a Jesuit priest from India, shared this wisdom tale which offers some food for thought on this theme of abundance and how a sense of scarcity makes it difficult to stay present to the abundance around us.²

The story begins thousands of years ago just after the burning of the great library of Alexandria in ancient Greece. It is said that only one book survived and it seemed to be very dull and uninteresting so it was sold to a poor man for just a few pennies. However, on the inside of the back cover, there was scrawled just a few sentences describing the secret of the Touchstone - a tiny pebble that could turn anything it touched into pure gold. The brief writing declared that this tiny precious pebble was lying somewhere on the shore of the Black Sea among thousands of other pebbles that were exactly like it except that this pebble was warm whereas all the other pebbles were cold to the touch. The man who had bought the book sold everything he had, which wasn't much, and borrowed enough money to last him a year and he headed to the Black Sea where he set up a tent and began the painstaking search for the Touchstone. To search for it, he would lift up one pebble and if it was cold he wouldn't toss it back down onto the beach but would throw it into the sea. He spent the whole day doing this without coming across a warm pebble. He was determined, though, and so he continued. Days stretched into weeks and weeks into months. Over and over again he would pick up a pebble, find that it was cold, and throw it into the sea. Pick up another pebble. Cold. Throw it into the sea. Until one day, about mid-afternoon, he picked up a pebble, and it was warm. But, before he realized what he was doing, he had thrown it into the sea.

Thinking about this story, it strikes me that what can keep us from fully appreciating what is present to us is this tendency to go mechanically about our lives. Not pausing long enough to notice where there is true warmth amidst the cold.

Trusting in the ancient faith that what we need is here and living from a place of "enough" can be an antidote to the perpetual quest to fill our emptiness with false sources of abundance.

At a time when it feels like things that we have depended on for stability - our basic democratic institutions, our natural environment, relationships with our local and global neighbors - when these things feel shaky and, indeed, may be falling apart, we can be pushed even more into a sense of scarcity. We become focused on what we are losing rather than what is present, what remains that does indeed serve our sense of peace and spaciousness.

² from [Heart of the Enlightened: A Book of Story Meditations](#) by Anthony de Mello

If we really believed that what we need is here, I think we'd pay more attention to one another and to the world around us.

What if we believed that there was abundant love in our relationships?

And, if not in our relationships, within ourselves?

What if we believed that there was abundant wisdom in our communities?

What if we believed that there is in fact enough time for what really matters?

Noticing and appreciating what is present in our lives that we truly need is the first step towards feeling a sense of abundance.

And, even when life feels challenging, when loss is all around us, we can pause to notice what is here.

In the film, *Human*, Yann Arthus-Bertrand, presents a collection of stories trying to answer the question, what does it mean to be human? One individual named John shared a story of visiting his grandfather just after his grandmother died. He calls it a magic moment. His grandparents had been married 65 years and his grandmother in recent years had been the driver and primary caregiver. John goes to see his grandfather and asks, "Grandpa, how are you doing?" His grandfather responds excitedly, "Did you know that for 4 dollars, I can get a shuttle anywhere in the city?" "Wow. That's great, Grandpa," John replies. "Well, I went to the grocery store, and I went to the woman behind the counter and I said, 'I have this list of things, could you help me find them? My wife has recently changed her residence to heaven.'" John replied, "Grandpa, you always help me see the glass as half full." His grandfather leaned back, looked him in the eyes and said, "It's a beautiful glass."³

It is a beautiful glass, indeed.

What can we do to live this way more consistently?

Noticing and appreciating what we have is the first step.

I believe that offering gratitude is the next step, and in a couple weeks, we will reflect more deeply on the practice of gratitude.

³ Human - clip #2 - Death is not the end of everything, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RWKNwzGL8C0&index=2&list=PLEgA6bEeal3ze5Ugq8LPC-uigROvLlvyi&t=1s>

And, I think there is one final step. And that is to live in a way that embodies our appreciation and gratitude - to live as if what we need is already here.

If you notice and appreciate that you live in a beautiful place. What can you do in your own life to embody that appreciation? If you feel a sense of abundance from your relationships with family or friends, how can you make it more of a priority to be with them in a meaningful way? If this church community is a place that connects you to a feeling of abundance, what can you do to be more fully present here and to take in the nurturing that you receive within our community?

I invite you as we begin this month and transition into the coming winter and holiday season to practice abundance. To notice what is present. To offer gratitude. And, to embody this appreciation in how you live.

I come back to the words of David Whyte:

“Enough. These few words are enough.
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we have refused
again and again
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Until now.”

May we open to this life now
in its fullness and abundance
knowing that it is, indeed, enough.