

## A Gospel of Enough

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DEUTERONOMY 8:12-18 (NRSV) *When you have eaten your fill and have built fine houses and live in them, <sup>13</sup>and when your herds and flocks have multiplied, and your silver and gold is multiplied, <sup>14</sup>then do not exalt yourself, forgetting the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, <sup>15</sup>who led you through the great and terrible wilderness, an arid wasteland with poisonous snakes and scorpions. He made water flow for you from flint rock, <sup>16</sup>and fed you in the wilderness with manna that your ancestors did not know, to humble you and to test you, and in the end to do you good. <sup>17</sup>Do not say to yourself, “My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth.” <sup>18</sup>But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, so that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your ancestors, as he is doing today.*

When you are full, do not forget. But we do forget, don't we? Walter Brueggemann writes: “Being full causes amnesia. Being comfortable causes indifference. Being secure makes us unresponsive.”<sup>1</sup>

EPHESIANS 3:20-21 (NRSV) *Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, <sup>21</sup>to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.*

With this closing doxology, the writer of Ephesians reminds his readers that the God we worship is a God of abundance: abundant resources through creation, abundant love, abundant grace—a God whose Son came, in John's words: “that we might have life, and have it more abundantly” (John 10:10).

But we forget. First, in our abundance, we forget the source of our abundance. And when we forget the source of our abundance, it's a short slide down a slippery slope to adopting a heresy of scarcity. We become anxious that we may not have enough.

In Advent and Christmas seasons in the past I have addressed the apparent lack of Joy among so many. Why isn't there more Joy? There may be theological reasons. In the residue of past faith expressions there may linger an image of God as brutally vindictive and judgmental. Such faith doesn't lead to joy.

Sometimes the pain and grief of personal loss is made even more severe by the festive atmosphere—the lights and music and memories of better days.

Or, there may be practical reasons—*especially* at this season. We habitually load our calendars and schedules to the point of insanity, and then double down during this season. The resulting stress leaves no room for joy. But, the voices of this world scream that our value is related to how busy we are. And we accept it without question, even though our bodies, our minds, our relationships, and, yes, our spirits, are exhausted, and our effectiveness suffers as a result.

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<sup>1</sup> Walther Brueggemann, *A Gospel of Hope* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2019)

And, while all of these are valid, I think there's an even more basic, primal issue underlying it all.

Back in the 70s I tried AMWAY. I have no criticism of the business model; but, I just discovered that I'm not motivated by money, and I'm not a sales person. Oh, I can make a better presentation than most; but, when it comes time to ask, "Will you buy the soap," I choke. So I quit.

A few months later I ran into my upline direct. He said he was disappointed that I quit. Said he envisioned me as a "Diamond Direct."

I told him I just wasn't motivated by money, and that my life had other priorities. He paused and said that he admired that in me: that I had a vision and was moving toward it. He said, "All I know how to do is make money and tell others how to make money. In the eternal scheme of things, that doesn't seem all that important."

I asked him, "Well, what is your vision for life? What do you want out of life?"

After a long pause, he said, quietly, "I don't know. I just know I want more."

Brueggemann writes,

"Our society hungers always for more: more body surgery, more cosmetics, more cars, more beer, more sex, more certitude, more security, more money, more power, more oil... whatever. This hunger for more is a true sign that we do not trust the goodness of God to supply all of our needs; we do not trust that the generous rule of Jesus who has ascended to power is in effect. But we, we are Jesus people, and therefore we are pledged and empowered to act differently, differently in the neighborhood, differently in the economy, and as citizens of the last superpower, differently in the world."<sup>2</sup>

"Our exhaustion, I propose, is rooted in anxiety that mistrusts the abundance that God has ordained into creation and, as a result, we—like the creator on the sixth day—have our spirits completely depleted. But we, unlike the creator, take no seventh day for refreshment, because, unlike the creator, we are too anxious to rest. And he says, "Come to me, all you that are weary." True creatureliness, like birds and lilies, trusts the abundance of the Father. But we imagine we know better in our wisdom and in our intelligence. We spend ourselves in the futility of trying to take the place of the life-guaranteeing God."<sup>3</sup>

I want to suggest that a first step—and I haven't finished Brueggemann's book; I don't know what he might suggest. But I want to suggest that a first step toward reclaiming a life that is more aware of Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love, is to consider and develop "A Gospel of Enough."

We make ourselves sick stressing over this heresy of scarcity. Will there be

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 2

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

enough time to do it all? Enough strength and endurance? Will there be enough time to relax? to sleep? Will there be enough patience? Will there be enough help?

Before you stress over whether there will be “enough,” determine the definition of “enough”. How much IS enough? What if we begin where Jesus began? He was born in poverty, laid in a manger. And it was enough.

I assume you are something like me. You find yourself pulled in two directions, haunted by two different versions of your life. One story is the money story, told and lived in the modern world. (It's) a story of self-sufficiency, hard work, competence and merit, and being secure on our own terms. The sign of that story is more—more goods, more influence, more alcohol, more stock options, more power, more published articles, more running shoes, more chemical dependence, more trips to Europe, more capital gains... It's a tale that insists that no matter how much we accumulate, it may not be enough: that more will make us happy and secure.

“I assume you are (something) like me—you know how powerful and tempting that story can be, and at least some of the time are drawn to it. But we also know and take seriously a different story; we're haunted by this other story, drawn to it, and on a good day, intend to invest our lives in it. This is the story of the gospel.

“It is the story of God's abundance evidenced in the mystery of creation. We know it in God's love (demonstrated in the Bethlehem manger); and we trust it because we have experienced it in intimate, concrete ways in our own lives.”<sup>4</sup>

What if we begin there? It won't be easy. Quoting Brueggemann again: “The New Testament church knows that Jesus' people suffer, not because such suffering is noble or pious or sadistic, but because the claim of truth by Jesus puts us into deep conflict with the way power is arranged in the world.”<sup>5</sup> And any challenge to that arrangement of power will be met with whatever it takes to put down the challenge—including brutality and violence.

“As Paul speaks of the God of hope ... he knew about a world of despair controlled with brutality and violence. And so do we. That world believes there are no new gifts, no fresh generosity, no possibility of newness or forgiveness, and so life becomes a zero-sum game to see who can stay the longest on top of the heap, all the while knowing that there will be no good outcome to the pointless rat race.

“Well, here is the news. Out beyond the despair that sanctions road rage and violence against the poor and war and ruthless exploitation and leaves one exhausted if not half dead—out beyond that is an alternative world in which there are new gifts and fresh starts grounded in divine forgiveness and sustained by divine abundance. We don't have to settle for the life this world offers us. That

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 8

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

Gospel is offered to us in this one who is about to be born among us.”<sup>6</sup>

This one who was laid in a manger—and it was enough.

This one who grew up in Nazareth (“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”)—and it was enough.

This one whose father was a poor laborer—but it was enough.

This one who, at his bar Mitzvah, discussed Scripture with rabbis and PhDs, and his knowledge was enough to amaze them.

This one who was given jugs of water when the need was wine—and it was enough.

This one who had no place to lay his head—and it was enough.

So, how do you define “enough”? Can we start there?

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 18-19.