

“Cultivating an Abundance State of Mind”

2 Corinthians 9: 6-15

What I mean is this: the one who sows a small number of seeds will also reap a small crop, and the one who sows a generous amount of seeds will also reap a generous crop.

⁷ Everyone should give whatever they have decided in their heart. They shouldn't give with hesitation or because of pressure. God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸ God has the power to provide you with more than enough of every kind of grace. That way, you will have everything you need always and in everything to provide more than enough for every kind of good work. ⁹ As it is written, *He scattered everywhere; he gave to the needy; his righteousness remains forever.*^[a]

¹⁰ The one who supplies seed for planting and bread for eating will supply and multiply your seed and will increase your crop, which is righteousness. ¹¹ You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous in every way. Such generosity produces thanksgiving to God through us. ¹² Your ministry of this service to God's people isn't only fully meeting their needs but it is also multiplying in many expressions of thanksgiving to God. ¹³ They will give honor to God for your obedience to your confession of Christ's gospel. They will do this because this service provides evidence of your obedience, and because of your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone. ¹⁴ They will also pray for you, and they will care deeply for you because of the outstanding grace that God has given to you. ¹⁵ Thank God for his gift that words can't describe!

This Sunday, we are celebrating a time of thanksgiving. And it would be so easy for me as the pastor to do as we do every year...invite us to sing songs of thanksgiving joy, to offer words which remind us of the goodness which surrounds us. I could easily stand up here before you as the pastor and invite us all to pretend

that we are not overwhelmed by grief and sadness, invite us all to put on our rose colored glasses and ignore the crisis which surrounds us.

However, as one who has picked up the mantle to preach the good news always, that forced celebration of thanksgiving would be wrong. It would be false and hollow. It would be disconnected from the real pain, the real fear, the real hurt which lays heavy on all our hearts right now. But maybe more so than all this, a forced celebration of thanksgiving takes energy, and I am tired.

I am tired of feeling helpless. I am tired of feeling hopeless. I am tired of being separated from loved ones. I am tired of hearing about sickness and death. I am tired.

Yet, even as I say these words, I know that they are coming from a point of privilege. Thankfully, I have employment which is flexible enough to juggle virtual school and work commitments. Thankfully, I have a roof over my head and food in my pantry. Thankfully, I have safety nets which can sustain my family in this time of crisis. Thankfully over these last few months, I have had the luxury to access the risks surrounding various activities, trying to determine whether or not my family and I would participate, knowing that I always had a choice.

But I know that there are people in our community who have not been able to make these same choices, who have not and are still not able to do the same. I

know that there are people in our community, in our nation, in our world who cannot say the same thankful statements as me during this time of crisis.

The realization of this fact goes beyond efforts to help. The realization of this fact goes deeper than just a season for caring and sharing. The realization of this deep-rooted inequality simply brings to light how broken our system really is.

Our world shifted because of COVID. Our world continues to shift because of COVID. This current crisis drew back the curtain to reveal the Truth which is the harsh reality for so many people: the reality of a broken health care system, the reality of a growing gap between the haves and the have nots, the reality of a lost community connection where now it seems like everyone only cares for themselves.

And to call us to celebrate with thanksgiving in light of all that seems insensitive and naïve at best because in this time, in this place, what our current crisis is revealing is that on so many levels, socially, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, we have a long way to go before healing and wholeness comes to fruition for all of God's people.

I have to tell you that I picked this text months ago, knowing that it is one usually read as part of Thanksgiving worship services. But this year, this year, I find little to inspire a sense of thanksgiving from Paul's words. In fact, his pleas to

give, to support come off as a sleazy car salesperson, trying to make a deal. They seem shallow and empty. And in light of our current context, the fact that I am reading them as our Scripture lesson this morning, can certainly be lifted up as an example of what is wrong with the church, only caring for its wants and needs while ignoring the cries for justice, the cries for mercy, the cries for grace which surround it.

After wondering if I should pick a different Scripture, the Spirit invited me to take another look, to see that the saving grace which turns Paul's words from a pitch to an authentic statement of faith comes in verse 14 (Message version).

Paul tells the Corinthians that we give thanksgiving and praise because we are “moved by the extravagance of God in our lives.” In that one statement, we get a clear understanding of what shapes Paul’s faith, what inspires Paul to lift thanksgiving amid heavy hearts and overwhelming sadness. In that one statement, Paul connects to the stories of his ancestors’ faith, which tell of how God had provided for God’s people over and over again, how God would continue to provide for God’s people, how God has worked and continues to work bringing healing and wholeness for God’s creation time and time again, and in spite of it all, the hurt, the pain, the sorrow, the worry, the fear it would have been enough.

Because you see, when Paul wrote this letter, it was a very vulnerable time in his life. He had already suffered persecution in his ministry and he was unsure of when he would make it back to Corinth. He had also heard of the struggles happening within the church at Corinth.

It would have been so easy for Paul to say to God, that's it. I'm done. I cannot do this anymore. Find someone else. Yet Paul knows that God has never abandoned God's people before and God was not about to start now. So, Paul remembers the stories of his ancestors wandering in the wilderness. Paul remembers the words of the prophets which called the people back home after Exile. Paul remembers that God since the beginning of time has brought forth comfort, strength, and hope for God's people over and over again.

This is the very foundation of Paul's faith, of our faith. This understanding of who God is and how God is at work in the world is the very basis of why we do what we do as people of faith. And we live out this understanding here and now by being in relationship with others. Paul understands that we cannot love our God with all our heart, mind, and spirit without also loving our neighbors as ourselves. These two commandments cannot be separated "because in the shalom/peace of God, no one can be left out or left behind. To bring them along and to assist them from abundance of what we have is to keep covenant with God."

As I re-read Paul's words, a hymn came to mind...the words reminding us that in sharing with others, we give to God what is God's alone. All that we have is God's and it is simply a trust given to us to use for the building up of God's Kingdom here on Earth. For whatever we share, whatever we give, whatever we do, we do it unto thee.

This mindset of abundance changes everything about Paul's words. They become a way for us as people of faith to change the narrative, moving it away from power and scarcity to grace and sustainability. This mindset of abundance shifts our focus. It calls us into gratitude because suddenly we realize thanksgiving is not about a day or a season. It is a way of being. It is way of "living towards God's will being done here on Earth as it is in heaven."

As people of faith, we know something that the world does not know and cannot understand. It has never been either/or. It has always been both and. We can live with a mindset of gratitude to our God from whom all blessings flow and know that this world still has a long way to go before it truly reflects God's Kingdom here on Earth. We can appreciate the gifts which fill our lives and know that there is injustice in our world. We can celebrate with thanksgiving and still feel the pain of sadness and fear which surrounds us.

This mindset of both and, this mindset of knowing that God is at work in the world is rooted in the knowledge that love and light will always overcome. And it is the mindset in which we are called to cultivate... a mindset of grace, a mindset of abundance, a mindset of community.

Like Paul, as ones who know and have been moved by the extravagance of God in our own lives, we have the strength and the courage to do just that because ultimately, in spite of the pain, the sadness, the worry, the fear, we know that our God is steadfast. Our God is faithful from generation to generation. And since the beginning of time, it has always been enough. Amen.