Stewardship – When Love Leads Us to Enough

Beloved community: I invite you join me in a spirit of prayer. Holy Loving Spirit, we offer such thanks week in and week out for the freedom to be gathered for this sacred pause – a time of worship on our live stream and in this space on Wahpekute Dakota land that has been loved for millennia. **We trust you to be with us now we wonder how your love can continue to lead us into enough for all.** We pray in the name of our great teacher, Jesus. Amen.

Every day, we are called to practice our faith – to live out of our shared sense of being grounded in and supported by the Love that is God. On this Giving Sunday, we are called to step forward in faith as co-creators with God in an expanding realm of wellbeing. We are called to be stewards (that is, faithful managers) of all that we are and all that we have. Why is it vitally important that we answer God's call to faithful stewardship? Because we join Jesus in setting our gaze on the horizon – where we glimpse a beloved community in which everyone has enough.

Well! As we consider our relative willingness or motivation to join Jesus on his quest toward enough for all, a few questions might surface. **How do we know when we or someone else has enough? And enough of what? Does enough look the same for everyone? What does enough feel like?**

This morning, both the gospel story of a meal shared among a crowd of 5,000 and Gwen Westerman's poem "Give-away Song" speak to us about how and why we can be God's co-creators of enough.

Before considering the wisdom present in the gospel story and poetry, let's consider the wisdom present in our society at this moment. 124 million neighbors participated in our midterm elections – our second highest turnout of us for midterm elections since 1914!

I wonder if any of you have, like me, felt a boost in your sense of patriotism across the past week?

What meaning can we make of this boost in our patriotism – our joyful proud engagement in our democracy? And what does this joyful pride have to do with cocreating the beloved community with our God of Love?

I find great meaning in the fact that so many people turned out to support varied candidates for office – whomever each voter considered trustworthy of the sacred privilege of leading us toward a more perfect union. And the meaning I find underneath 124 million of us choosing to imagine that elected leaders can move us toward a more perfect union are a few of the principles that rest at the foundation of our democracy – principles which have EVERYTHING to do with all people having enough.

We find those principes in the preamble to our Declaration of Independence. I invite you to say all are part of it with me as the words surface for you. Let's improve upon our founders' work by saying "all people" instead of "all men." If this comes to you, say it with me: *"We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all [people] are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain **unalienable** Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."*

Unalienable means that these rights belong to every human being by virtue of their humanity. As patriots AND as Christians, we strive to live our days in ways that uphold these rights for ALL of our neighbors and ourselves through our efforts of daily living:

- The right to Life – declares that all people deserve to live in safety, with adequate access to food, housing, health care, and more.
- The right to Liberty – declares that all people deserve to be free – to be autonomous in the choices that we make about living out our days.

- The right to the Pursuit of Happiness – declares that all people deserve to flourish, experiencing vitality and purpose in their days.

Let's turn to how these rights of all to have enough life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness connect to our gospel story. This week this story that is so familiar to many of us surfaced for me some truisms. Here's the first one:

'Actions speak louder than words.' **Actions are often more compelling – more noticeable - than words.** We hear, *"A large crowd kept following him because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick."* St. Croix United Church: what signs are we showing to our neighbors in the St. Croix Valley?

It was **not about IF they would attempt to meet a need** (in Jesus' mind), but about **how they would meet the need** at hand. We hears, *"When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, 'Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?'"*

I would like to own an interpretation I have often layered onto Jesus' straightforward question. Instead of listening with an open mind to what Jesus wondered, I have often loaded onto it doubt and skepticism, which come from the whispers of scarcity mindset that sometimes dominate our times and places. Instead of hearing Jesus' open-ended question (*"Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?")* I have often heard more of a statement masquerading as a question: 'We can't feed this whole crowd, can we?'

But, no. Jesus' question opened a door to creativity. Is our church opening words to creativity as we seek to meet the needs of our neighbors.

Another truism: 'Waste not, want not!' I think that is a statement about careful management and conservation. We heard, *"When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, 'Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.'*

So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets." Part of our prayerful discernment when giving of our resources – our money, our time, our energy and care – to our church, is to be clear on what we do have, what we need, and what we need conserve on our way toward generosity with ourselves and with others.

Conservative and liberal can be a beautiful balance, actually. We need to conserve, we need to carefully manage, and we need to be liberal enough to share generously. We heard poet laureate Gwen Westerman say:

"This is my give-away
Because ***I have enough to share with you***
because I have been given so much
health love happiness
pain sorrow fear
to share from the heart"

We must be very clear about who we are and what we have in order to be able to share it abundantly with others. She also said:

"This is my give-way—
to touch what is good in you
with words your heart can hear
like ripples from a pebble
dropped in water"

How might our loving ways of life as this congregation impact our wider community? Are we clear on the pebbles we are dropping and the ripple of impact they are actually having?

I'd like to close with words from Susan Werner, a singer songwriter and self-proclaimed evangelical agnostic who was raised Roman Catholic.

Having studied Jewish and Christian scriptures, she honors them by bringing core teachings to light through her music. Hear these words from a song entitled “Help Somebody,” from her 2007 album, *The Gospel Truth.* Susan Werner sings:

“I got plenty and then some
What do I do?
Plenty and then some
What do I do?
I got plenty and then some
What do I do, now?
I go out and help somebody
Get plenty and then some, too…” She goes on:

“I got a roof over my head
What do I do?...

I got supper on the table
What do I do?...

'Cause I got it to give
I got it to give
And when you got enough to give away
Well it's the only way to live.”

Friends, let us be clear about moving together and with neighbors who are friends not yet known toward recognizing that the Love of God leads us toward enough for all. That Love is counting on us. Amen.

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St. Croix United Church (Bayport, MN)
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Mark 4:1-9, “On the Pulse of the Morning”