

Called to Abundance

1 Corinthians 1:1-9
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Bible scholar Walter Brueggeman says, “We never feel that we have enough; we have to have more and more, and this insatiable desire destroys us. Whether we are liberal or conservative Christians,” says Brueggeman, “we must confess that the central problem of our lives is that we are torn apart by the conflict between our attraction to the good news of God’s abundance and the power of our belief in scarcity – a belief that makes us greedy, mean and unneighborly.”¹

Believe it or not, the Christians in Corinth to whom Paul is writing in today’s New Testament lesson were greedy, mean and unneighborly. We see this later in his letter, in Chapter 4, where Paul calls them out for judging one another unfairly, not looking for the good in others. Instead, they acted like they were better than everyone else, not even noticing their own faults and areas of growth and learning.

Well, that same spirit of superiority divisiveness and infighting seems to have taken hold of our world today. We see it globally nation against nation, nationally as political leaders and news makers go at it day after day, locally in disputes about how to best meet the needs of our communities, and personally when friends and family members can’t even give each other a break.

In the midst of such discord, Paul calls us to unity. He addresses his letter to “the church of God that is in Corinth,” but really he’s talking to all those of every time and place who seek a better way. “... To those called to be saints,” he says, “together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Do you hear the call for unity there – where he says, all who seek the Lord, both their Lord and ours! We are all one in the eyes of the Lord, equally blessed and equally needy, everyone in need of God’s grace and peace.

Who do you know who’s in need of a little grace today? Where is the “peace of God, which passes all understanding” most needed in your life? Don’t you believe God wants to give you these things – the grace to be a blessing in hard times, and the peace that comes from this? The grace of God is freely given to all who seek it, so nobody has any right to lord things over someone else. In the peace of God, we all stand equal alongside one another. In the grace and peace the Lord, nobody has any right to be mean or inconsiderate to others. So where does that negativity and infighting come from?

¹ Walter Brueggeman in *Christian Century* (March 24-31, 1999)

Well, as Walter Brueggeman noted, it arises out of our fear of scarcity. We feel we need to compete for that which is freely given. Our problem is not that we are lacking, that we need certain things we just don't have. Our problem is that we have things that we don't know we have.

We are so busy worrying about what we don't have that we forget God intends for us to lack nothing we truly need. We go around saying to ourselves, "if I just had more time ..., more money ..., better health..., a nicer car..., a different job..., better friends..., more confidence..., then life would be so much easier." The problem is, enough is never enough for us. And those with the most are often the greediest.

A guy was walking past a hospital when he noticed a sign that said, "Pay \$100 for a treatment and if we can't cure you, get \$200 back." So he decides to fool them and get some extra money. He goes in and says to the doctor, "I lost my sense of taste." The doctor says, "Here, drink this medicine." The man takes a sip and says, "Yuck!" "That tastes terrible." "Congratulations," says the doctor. "You got your taste back." Now the guys out \$100, so he decides to get even. The next day he goes back and tells the doctor he lost his memory. The doctor grabs the bottle of medicine and says, "Here, drink this." The guy looks at him and says, "Isn't that for taste buds?" "Congratulations," says the doctor. "You got your memory back." And the doctor got the \$200. Those with the most are often the greediest.

Instead of worrying about what you don't have, focus on discovering what God wants to give you, how God desires to bless you. Here are some suggestions to help us receive what God offers so that we are "lacking in nothing." If we are holding tightly to a way of life just because it is familiar; if we are clutching a conviction that money is the ultimate safety net; if our hands are filled with lists of things "to do" so that we don't have to think about how we fall short in reflecting God's grace and peace to others: Let's open our hands and let go of all that distraction and negativity. We can't receive what God offers until we let go of habits and attitudes that are destructive, that drain our strength, hold us back from receiving God's blessing.

Paul knows that God desires to bless those who truly turn to him, trust in him. That's why he says to the Corinthians – and to us – "I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, for in every way you have been enriched in him...." In other words, we have everything we need to live the life God has called us to, a life of abundance, if only we would trust in God.

Not that that's easy. We live in a world that's more and more polarized and divisive – with one side not even trying to get along with the other, and this makes life hard for us and for all people. So we do what we can to hold on. Thankfully, God even provides for this. God gives us the strength to keep going. As Paul says, "He will ... strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ."

This means we don't have to give in to the greed and self-centeredness, the fighting and discord that has taken hold of this world. We can stand strong in the faith, knowing that Christ will prevail in the end, and that in Christ, we will be OK. "God is faithful," says Paul, "by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord," and it is in this fellowship that true abundance is to be found.

We have an abundance of faith, an abundance of love, an abundance of caring. And when we don't feel that, when this world is getting us down, we can turn to each other for the strength to get us through, knowing that it is only in standing alongside one another in the spirit of Jesus Christ that any of us is able to stand at all. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER

Eternal God, you have given us everything. You have given us life, and with the gift of life you have given us all that makes life worth living ... the gift of beauty in creation and in the work of human hands; the gift of love and the gift of friendship; the continual passing of the seasons, delighting our senses, telling of your faithfulness, and sustaining our lives.

You have given us new life in Jesus Christ: the revelation of your love in the life that he led, the proclamation of your truth in the things that he said, the promise of eternal life through faith in him, the inspiration to serve him daily through the power of the Holy Spirit. Thank you, God.

We thank you for the care and comfort we receive, even as we pray your Spirit of comfort, healing and strength upon others. We thank you, O God, for all that you have given us. Help us to receive as freely as you give. Help us to know you through the grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ, Jesus who taught us to pray together, saying:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.