
Jubilee: Abundance in a World of Scarcity

A sermon by the Rev. Canon David Boyd
The Third Sunday after the Epiphany – Year C

“There was never enough to go around.”

That’s what she told herself, even though, if she were honest, she had never gone hungry. There was always dinner on the table, new clothes for school, and presents on her birthday. By most standards, her life was fine - better than fine, really. But still, she felt it: the sense that there was something missing, something unfair.

It wasn’t food or gifts she longed for; she longed for favor. Somehow, it always felt in short supply. Maybe the love was lost in translation. Or maybe it was her brother - loud, funny, always in the center of things - who sucked up all the air in the room. It seemed he got the attention, the praise, the little winks that seemed to say, “You’re my favorite.” She could never quite tell if it was real favoritism or just how things seemed in her heart, but the feeling was there, and it stuck: no matter what she had, it wasn’t enough. Even when the table was full, love always felt scarce. Like there was only so much to go around, and someone else always got the bigger share.

Whether we’ve been victims of it or practitioners of it, I’m sure some of us resonate with the feeling of favoritism, that old, primordial problem first faced by Cain and Abel and passed down generation to generation. When we believe there’s not enough love, or mercy, or blessings to go around, we scramble to secure our portion. Favoritism necessarily assumes scarcity. When it’s our turn to show favor, we often do the calculus to decide who’s more deserving or worthy to receive our favor. If we think the pie is limited, we cut smaller slices and guard them for those we deem “good enough,” and you know who gets the largest piece!

If we believe love is scarce, then we will attach conditions to affection, making others jump through hoops: “Prove your worth before I accept you.” If we believe mercy is finite, then we hesitate to forgive, in case extending forgiveness depletes the small reservoir we have left. Scarcity tells us that someone else’s blessing is our loss. The teacher’s pet knows this, the golden child knows this. I wonder if any of us have escaped the feelings of favoritism, its erosion of trust and celebration of competition. It is present in families, in workplaces, on Wall Street and Main Street, in national politics and in local churches. The world assumes scarcity. The critical question is, “Does God?”

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” - Luke 4:18-19

Jesus, in his inaugural address, proclaims God’s favor and proclaims it abundantly! This is the first speech of Jesus that Luke records; it’s his messianic mission statement. Every phrase sings of good news, freedom, sight, and release, all pointing to “the year of the Lord’s favor.” He’s quoting Isaiah, who preached a prophetic love song to the Hebrew people in exile, urging them to come home, to leave behind the ways of Babylon for the kingdom of God. Reading from the scroll, Jesus brings the promises of God into the present; the gates to the kingdom are open now, open to the poor, to the prisoners, to the oppressed. “God is with the poor, so I am with the poor,” says Jesus. “God is with the blind, and so I am with the blind,” says Jesus. “God is with the

incarcerated, so I am with the incarcerated," says Jesus. After all, there's more than enough to go around!

In comparison to the zero-sum game that is human favoritism, God's favor operates from a completely different reality. In Jesus' words, we hear a testament to abundance: good news isn't doled out to a select few, but declared to the masses; freedom isn't purchased by the privileged, but bestowed on captives and the oppressed. Jesus speaks of a kingdom where nobody is shut out due to lack. With God, mercy doesn't diminish when it's shared; it multiplies. Love doesn't shrink when given away; it grows. With God, a few fish and a couple loaves can become a feast for thousands. Every story of Jesus offering grace - healing lepers, dining with sinners, pardoning sins - shouts the same message: *There's room for you too.*

Abundance is the motto of the kingdom that Jesus proclaims. "The year of the Lord's favor" - often understood as "Jubilee" - was meant to be a time of debt cancellation, liberation of slaves, and restoration of families to their ancestral land. Even creation heals; jubilee means lands lie fallow as the people live off the abundance of the previous harvest. It's a picture of cosmic reset, where everyone starts anew and no one is crushed by yesterday's burdens. There is joy to be found in jubilee, the joy of being fully connected with God and neighbor, endowed with dignity and favor. And the Jubilee ideal isn't only for the benefit of the poor; restoration comes to everyone. Everyone benefits when liberty and wellbeing extend across the entire neighborhood.

Even better, this jubilee promise of abundance, Jesus declares, is fulfilled here and now! There is no waiting for a distant day; through Jesus, our eyes are opened to the kingdom of God present in our midst. Old burdens need not define us, and the anxious grip of scarcity can loosen as we learn to trust this generous, liberating God. In Christ, the time of Jubilee has truly arrived; we are free to live in the overflow of God's abundance and invite others to share in it.

Even though Jesus so clearly announces God's abundant favor, we still find it hard to shake the false script of scarcity. But scripture repeatedly unmasks scarcity as a fear-based illusion. The same Spirit that empowered Jesus to proclaim good news in Nazareth is still at work today, revealing God's immeasurable generosity. Example after example in the Gospels - from water turned to wine, to the feeding of the five thousand, to the cross itself - shows that God's life-giving power doesn't run out when shared. In fact, grace multiplies in the giving.

What does this mean for us? It means our fear of scarcity need not dictate how we treat others or how we see ourselves. In God's kingdom, the cup is never merely full; it overflows, spilling goodness and mercy into every corner of life. We don't have to scramble for the last scrap of love; we can embrace the truth that God's favor is an open invitation to all.

It may take time for our hearts to catch up to this truth. But the invitation is now: Let God's abundant favor wash over you. No need to deny it. No need to hoard it. No need to limit it to the "deserving." Let it flow through you to others, becoming a living witness that in God's economy, mercy abounds, love abounds, grace abounds.

Never enough? God says otherwise. In Christ, there's always more where that came from, until we all stand whole and free in the presence of the God who pours out favor on us without measure.

Amen.