

January 18, 2004  
Second Sunday after Epiphany  
David L. Edwards

### **Awaken to Abundance**

Psalm 36:5-10      *They feast on the abundance of your house,  
and you give them drink from the river of your delights.*

1 Corinthians 12:1-11      *Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit...*

John 2:1-11      *...the steward called the bridegroom and said to him,  
“Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior  
wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept  
the good wine until now.”*

#### Abundance and Scarcity

Scripture proclaims that we have everything we need in order to live a full life, as God made us and intends us to live. Abundance is all around us and in us. All we need is to awaken to it.

The dominant spirit of our day is one of scarcity. We have become convinced that there is not enough for everyone and that we have to scratch and claw in order to “get ours.” The spirit of scarcity breeds selfishness. The claim on us of our neighbor’s poverty or hunger or sickness no longer seems compelling. The spirit of scarcity also creates in us a constant feeling of insufficiency. We feel that we never have enough or are enough.

We read daily of the abundance of wealth garnered by those “at the top” of our society, and the scarcity that is tearing apart the social fabric of education, health, and mere sustenance for millions of men, women, and children. We allocate hundreds of billions of dollars developing our weapons of mass destruction and carrying out our wars, without blinking an eye. Yet we begrudge those who are poor every single dollar provided in assistance. And now we are being told that what we need is to send someone to Mars! Unwilling to muster the moral resolve to meet human needs on earth, we continue to distract ourselves and waste more resources on space adventures.

The issue is not real scarcity. It is distribution and sharing, a just society and world in which we finally recognized that we have everything we need, all of us, if we only see to it that all have what they need.

Where to begin to change this? We begin with ourselves. Our scripture readings this morning speak of abundance. Our spiritual work is to awaken to the abundance of life—life in this creation of which we are part, life in Jesus Christ who reveals to us abundance of living, and life in his community that has abundant gifts for the new life and the ministry to which Christ has called us.

If we examine our own spirits, we may find that the spirit of scarcity has poisoned our spiritual outlook. We feel that we don’t have enough faith, enough love, enough of whatever it is we think makes up the life of faith. So our spiritual lives become narrowly focused on ourselves in isolation from everything around us. The spiritual life, however, needs to be one of opening outward, of becoming aware of reality, of all that is around us and in us, the whole web of life into which we are woven. If our spiritual journey is on that path of awakening, then we will become more and more conscious of abundance. Abundance is the truth of life, not scarcity.

### Abundance in Creation

The psalmist contemplates the creation and perceives everywhere God's presence, steadfast love, eternal care, and provision. "Your steadfast love, O Lord, extends to the heavens, your faithfulness to the clouds. Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains, your judgments are like the great deep; you save humans and animals alike, O Lord." These are the words of one who is awake to God's abundant presence in and through the creation. This kind of awakened spirit overcomes the kind of cosmic loneliness bred into us by our Western technological view of nature as "inanimate," as something apart from ourselves to be used and conquered. The psalmist's spirit is kin to the native peoples of this land who saw in every form of life, from rocks to trees to stars, the presence of the Divine. Experiencing the world this way, as the psalmist does, fills us with a sense of belonging and of responsibility for caring for the earth.

The abundance of creation is for our spirits and our bodies. Says the psalmist: "All people feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights." These feasting images speak of physical and spiritual nourishment. Of both there is abundance for all.

Our inward journey is the growth in awareness of our relatedness to all creation. When we increase our awareness that we are not isolated, independent beings, but a part of everything around us, a great loneliness is overcome. We realize that we are a part of the community of the universe God has made. In that community there is an abundance of nourishment for the body and spirit, of delight for our senses and our souls. Whether we contemplate a flower sitting on our table at home or the mountains surrounding us, bathed in the soft rosy light of winter, our spiritual devotion needs to be regularly focused on this creation in which we live, of which we are integrally a part. As we do this, the conviction of the abundance of life will grow in us.

### Abundance in Community

Paul talks about the abundance of gifts in the community of faith. These "spiritual gifts," *charismata*, are the welling up of God's spirit into the particular lives of people. Paul says that to each person "is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." "Manifestation" (*phaneros*) means something invisible that is made visible. The unseen Spirit of God is made visible in the lives and gifts of each person. There is one spirit of the one God. But that oneness of God bears the fruit of diversity, not conformity.

In the Corinthian community everyone was trying to make everyone else like them. People wanted others to mirror their own viewpoints and religious experiences. The spirit of conformity is strong and subtle in us. It is another way we try to control others and God's spirit. So little groups of like-minded folks banded together in Corinth and looked upon each other as competitors and enemies. The spirit in Corinth was uniformity, not diversity, scarcity, not abundance. Whenever there is a drive toward sameness, toward uniformity, there is no evidence of God. God's oneness gives birth to diversity and difference—a variety of gifts. That's Paul's message.

Each person is himself or herself a gift to the community. And each person brings at least one gift for the benefit of the whole. Our spiritual work is to develop the perceptiveness to see those gifts in others and ourselves, to call them forth, and to make room for them in the community's life and ministry.

The challenge is, however, that each person entering the community will change the community. So we have to be willing to be changed, to become more diverse and less uniform in outlook and experience. The idea is not to "fit people in" to who we are. Our spiritual work as a community is to open up to this dynamic work of God's spirit that is always causing new life to spring up.

This church has always had a sense of the importance of gifts. We affirm that a person is somehow unfulfilled and stunted until she discovers her own giftedness, what it is that she brings to life and to the church. With the discovering of our giftedness we begin to discern our callings, what God is leading us to do with our lives on this earth. If we can be that kind of community, then we will find others being attracted. But in order to truly be a community of God's spirit that manifests itself in diversity, we must be ready to receive and encourage others in their gifts and callings.

So another dimension of our spiritual journey is to wake up to the abundance of God's spirit in community, a community of diverse gifts, callings, and activities. This means that we must be even more devoted to the inward journey, the daily communion with God through prayer, silence, inner listening, and study, to be grounded in and in touch with God's spirit that gives birth to the diversity of gifts in others and ourselves.

### Abundance in Christ

Finally, our spiritual journey is our awakening to the abundance that Christ brings to us. It is what the Gospel of John calls "eternal life" or "abundant life." It isn't life after death. The Christian life is not about "getting saved" and then waiting around to go to heaven. Jesus never talked like that. The good news is that there is abundant, eternal life all around us and in us right now, as well as forever.

In John's gospel, Jesus begins his ministry at a wedding party! That should tell us something right off the bat. Jesus wasn't a pious ascetic who shunned human festivity and joy. He seems to have enjoyed it quite well. This drew the fire of his pious critics who accused him of being "a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!" (Lk. 7:34) Jesus confirmed and celebrated the goodness of life. He went on to deepen this goodness. He didn't separate the physical and spiritual. They are all of a piece, a whole.

This is seen in Jesus' turning the water into wine. The wine for the wedding feast had run out. This was a terrible crisis of hospitality in those days. Jesus' mother urged him to do something about it, knowing that it was within his power. Though he tried to resist, referring to the "hour" of his full revealing—his death, resurrection, and ascension—Jesus in the end did not disdain this opportunity to sustain human festivity and display the glory of God. So he turned the six water jars into well over a hundred gallons of fine wine. The emphasis in the story is on the quantity and the quality of the wine. It is abundance, overflowing and extravagant abundance.

A great theme of John's gospel is the abundant life that comes from our association with Jesus. To believe in Christ, to follow him, to receive God's love in him, is to be connected with true life that can only be called "eternal." It is life beyond the chains of fear, beyond the fear of death, the life of unbounded participation in the very love of God.

Jesus lived a life fully awakened to God and to the abundance of life as created by God, the abundance of life when lived in communion with God. His life and his teachings were aimed at waking people up to that abundance. Living such a life drew the devotion and discipleship of some. It aroused feelings of being threatened in others, especially those who held on religious and political power, who lived by scarcity and control. For this he was killed. But his disciples experienced his life that could not be overcome by the forces that tried to snuff out the life of abundance and awareness of abundance--the resurrection, his new and continuing presence with us and the world.

The life of Christian faith is a life centered in the living Christ, a life being transformed from a spirit of scarcity to a spirit of abundance. Let each of us be on that journey of growing awareness of what we have already been given, the journey of awakening to abundant life.