

Centre Congregational Church, U.C.C.
Sunday, 21 October 2018

Hebrew Scripture: Isaiah 43:16-21
Christian Scripture: John: 6:1-14

“Giving from Scarcity or Giving from Abundance”¹



Welcome to ‘Week One’ of our church’s Stewardship Campaign! This is not only the first Stewardship Campaign that I have ever had the pleasure of planning and leading at Centre Congregational Church, it is also the first Stewardship Campaign that I have ever planned and led, period! So, it sure as heck better work!

Seriously, I am not worried about this Stewardship Campaign because very recently I have chosen you and you have chosen me - and when we pledge our resources next month, we will pledge

¹ It is true that all great people stand on the shoulders of (previous) giants. So, it is with Father Richard Rohr. In his podcast entitled “Worldviews of Abundance Verses Scarcity” on 28 July 2018, Rohr cites as his source the text *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. Of course, Rohr is also a disciple of Thomas Merton, and much of Rohr’s genius comes from Merton. With the above references cited referenced by Richard Rohr, I cite Rohr as the inspiration for this message. I do not quote Rohr, but I no doubt reference phrases and themes as I took cryptic notes while listening to his podcast.

ourselves to one another again. In doing so, we will pledge ourselves to this community and to the gospel of Jesus Christ.



This Stewardship Campaign must also work because, well, because it has to. We have no choice. Our church is in a very precarious position. We can sink or swim. We can thrive or slowly die. Who in this church, honestly, wants to fail? Who in this church, honestly, wishes to go through the agony of moving from a full-time to a part-time pastorate? Who (I promise you, not one of you, and not I) wishes to close our church doors and become another performing arts venue? No one.



On the other hand, who wants to fulfil our promise to pay back our obligation to the endowment fund for the refurbishment of the steeple? Who would like a full-time Administrative Secretary to improve the efficiency of our church? Who wants a full-time Sexton to better care for our building? Who wants a capital campaign of about two to three million dollars to renovate and modernize our church? Who wants to hire two, no, three Associate Ministers so you don't have to hear me preach every week? Me! This is where we are going. It won't happen this year, or even in five years, but this is where we are going and it starts this month with this Stewardship Campaign. So, I am confident it will work. After the end of our Stewardship Campaign, we will be able to say confidently: "No matter who you are, no matter where you are on life's journey, your tithes and offerings are welcome here!"²

This morning I am not really going to focus on 'giving'. Today, I am not going to 'appeal'. Today, I am not going to ask us to be generous. I am not going to beg, plead, and grovel. (That will happen in the coming weeks.) Today, we are simply going to 'identify'. We are going to identify from where we are coming on life's journey.

² Adapted from "Because remember - No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, your money is welcome here." From "Are You Ready to Talk About Money In Your Church?" written by Lillian Daniel and Martin Copenhaver, United Church of Christ, brochure.



Yes, we will point to where we want to go. But, today, let us just take step one and honestly ask ourselves, 'Where are we'? That is all, only: 'Where am I on life's journey?'

Is the god you worship
'limited' or 'infinite'?

This morning I first ask: In your own mind's eye, is the god you worship 'limited' or 'infinite'? If you answer 'infinite', then the Stewardship Campaign is over and it is a success. Because if God can accomplish and love 'infinitely', and you worship that same god, than you can and will give 'infinitely'!

Is the god you worship 'limited' or
'infinite'?

Is God's presence in
your life 'scarce' or
'abundant'?

Second, this morning I ask: In your own mind's eye, is God's presence in your life 'scarce' or is God's presence in your life 'abundant'? Do you sense and feel the power, the love and the assurance of God as 'insufficient' or do you sense and feel the power, the love and assurance of God as almost 'overwhelming'? If

you answer, ‘overwhelming’, then the Stewardship Campaign is over and it is a success! Because, if you and God are so intimately intertwined, then all that God has is yours and all that you have is God’s. You want for nothing. You have everything, so you can give everything!

is the golden worship limited or infinite?
is both promises you the "same" or "abundance"?

**Do you behave, speak
and act from a place of
'scarcity' or
'abundance'?**

Third, I ask this morning: Do you feel, speak and act from a place of ‘scarcity’ or from a place of ‘abundance’? I will ask again: In your own mind’s eye, do you feel, speak and act from a place of ‘scarcity’ or ‘abundance’? In other words, when we speak, or when we vote (as I did on Friday), or when we tithe, do we do so with a worldview that says, ‘Resources are limited. There is not enough. What I possess must be protected’?

Truth be told (remember, I am not trying to persuade us to give today, I only seek to *identify* where we are), truth be told, at least ninety-five percent of us, *and I include myself in the ninety-five percent here*, give with a mind-set that says, ‘My resources are limited. There is not enough. What I have must be protected’.



Why? Well, if I were to pledge *today*, I would pledge thinking ‘I only have so much, the needs are too great, and what I have must be saved and preserved’. If I pledged today, I would pledge from a worldview of scarcity because, in my own mind’s eye, the god I worship is limited and the god I worship I sometimes do not sense is present in my life. And it is because this god is limited, so then am I limited. And it because this god is often not positively experienced in my life, I can’t be often positively experienced in others’ lives. And because the source of my life is limited, so also limited are the resources I can share.

Before we begin this campaign, let us admit to one another right now: The god in our own mind’s eye is limited. God is often not felt in our lives. Therefore, what we can give is limited and the ministries this church can offer are limited.



We worship in a context of scarcity, not abundance. Let us be honest. I am as guilty as you. This is the point from which most of us are beginning.

Yet, I am not leaving us here! We want to move from this place of scarcity to abundance in five weeks. I with you. We are in this together. Where does this limited understanding of God and God's impact in our lives leave us? It leaves us with a win/lose mentality. It leaves with anxiety. It leaves us exhausted. It leaves us bitter and angry. It leaves us selfish. It leaves us hoarding. It leaves us, quite frankly, miserable.



The state of our country is miserable. The ethic of this country is 'we must win and others must lose'. 'America First', everyone else last. There is not enough resources to provide health care. There is not enough resources to provide education. There is not enough resources to protect the environment. But, we must protect the wealth we have. We must expand our military. In fact, not only must we protect our wealth; we must get forever richer; we must constantly grow our economy; we must have more because what we have is not enough!



My culture, my country, my church and I, if I am honest, I as well, operate with a mind's eye that that because God is insufficient, so also what is given is insufficient.



I believe our scripture reading from the gospel of John perfectly illustrates both a worldview of scarcity verses a worldview of abundance. In our story, the disciples operate from a limited worldview whereby God and Jesus are limited and not yet very much experienced in their lives. They exclaim that there is not enough to go around. People must be sent back to where they came to get their own food. But one boy, seeming the only one, operated from a worldview of abundance. Though he had little, he saw it as abundant, and offered it to others, saying 'Here, I have enough to share'.



I believe the real miracle here occurred when, after the thousands learned of what this boy did, they then pulled their little bit of food from their bags, collected it together and shared it communally. That would be a miracle if that happened in our country! When this occurred, it was realized that there was more than enough. In fact, not only was there enough, there was more than enough.

Friends in Christ, today, I am not ‘appealing’. I am instead ‘identifying’ my spiritual deficit. I see the world as having scarce resources and what I have must be protected from others. Scarcity is the worldview of my individualistic and materialistic culture. Scarcity is the worldview of my militaristic and manna-worshipping country. But, this *cannot* be the worldview of my church. It can’t be! It can’t be the worldview of my church because it is not the worldview of the boy in our Johannine narrative; it is not the worldview of Jesus Christ; it is not the worldview of the Gospel.



Our Stewardship Campaign theme for the next month is “Behold, see I am doing a new thing! Can you not perceive it?” I am going to ask that you journey with me out of a worldview of scarcity and into a new worldview of abundance. Some of you are ahead of me. Please don’t leave me behind! I will try to catch-up to you. For those of you behind me, hurry, catch-up! I will wait for you! But let us all move in the same direction. If our God is limited, so will we be. If God does not have abundant love for us, we not be willing to share our received love with anyone else. Our giving will be finite, if our source is finite. We will give abundantly, if our source is abundant.

This was the word of God, and it was spoken to the people of God, and the people of God responded, “Amen”.