

The Myth of Scarcity and the abundance of God
Mark 6: 30- 34 & 53 – 56
 - **What the feeding of the 5000 points to.**

Behind our text from Mark leading up to and following the feeding of the 5000 is the question **“what sort of world do we have?”**
 And what sort of world do we want!

- Are we trapped in a bleak barren world of unfulfilled needs?
- Or a lush, garden where there is enough for all to eat and be filled?
- In fact there is not just enough but an abundance.

In **“*The liturgy of abundance, the myth of scarcity*”** Walter Brueggemann writes:

“We have a love affair with “more” – and we will never have enough. Consumerism is not simply a marketing strategy. It has become a demonic spiritual force among us, and the theological question facing us is whether the gospel has the power to help us withstand it.”

In this fascinating book Brueggemann an O.T. scholar shows that what we see there is “a liturgy of abundance” a God who showers humanity and indeed all creation with abundance and generosity.

We have in the creation stories a state where things are good, even very good. There is plenty for all, in fact an abundance. It affirms generosity and denies scarcity.

This theme continues with the promise to Abraham of a great nation – of abundant offspring! He’s blessed as are “all” the nations through him.

The “myth of scarcity” Brueggemann says arises with Pharaoh. Who has a dream that famine will ravage the land. Hence he organizes to gather, control and monopolize the food supply.

This fear also breeds ruthlessness – and Joseph is hired to manage the monopoly –

- The starving people give up their land for food,
- later they give their cattle to survive,
- and finally put themselves into slavery rather than starve.

That’s how the children of Israel become slaves in Egypt.

The only ones unaffected are the priests – for Pharaoh wants from them their blessing.

When the captive people multiply and prosper – Pharaoh is afraid once more and through killing their boy babies seeks to control the threat of scarcity.

But when in the desert there is a gracious abundance from God in the manna from the sky, However if one seeks to hoard and grasp it greedily, it goes bad.

Jesus' feeding the 5000 and healings in Mark echo this generosity of God, in the face of the myth of scarcity. –

The disciples are hooked into the common assumption – “send the people away to buy food before they get hungry” – Our resources are scarce they contend!

As God gave manna in the wilderness, so in this desert place bread is given afresh -

By the one identified as “the bread of life”.

Such is some of the rich symbolism of these biblical accounts.

Are we that different today?

We certainly have more than most of those of earlier generations, the divide between the haves and have not's has widened even more during recent boom years.

Was the economic crash caused by a greed for more, more than we could actually afford?

Are we today in this affluent western context stuck in the ambiguity between God's abundance and the power of our belief in scarcity – a belief that makes us greedy, mean, unneighbourly.

Can the news of God's abundance be trusted in the face of the story of scarcity, particularly in tough economic times?

Now as you know I'm no accountant, but I have felt that government efforts to stimulate economies by pouring in cash simply encourages us to continue our spending when the real issue is to take this time as an opportunity to carefully consider whether we should continue to spend in the way we have done? And to carefully look at what we spend on and what that spending actually results in and achieves.

At a recent seminar I attended on global warming Dr Wayne Cartwright contended that the current economic path being followed by the West, using what is called the “Triple bottom line model” is doomed to failure if left unchecked. This model depicts three interconnecting spheres of life, the social, environmental and economic. The assumption has been that each has equal influence therefore keeping each of these vital areas of life in equilibrium. The reality is though that the economic in our Western society has been allowed to vastly dominated to the detriment of society and even more so the environment.

He contended that it has been known since the early 50’ that the path of consumerism and increasing affluence is not sustainable, but no government has had the courage to tackle the issue. Our economic path is unsustainable and our current recession is a clear warning sign for us.

Illustration: Required set of Ethics and Values.

The required set of societal Ethics and Values

These include:

1. Placing great importance on non-material sources of happiness.
2. Removing the perceived linkage between economic growth, material possessions, and success.
3. Affirming the deep interdependence of all people. The associated community values include a robust sense of mutual respect, fairness, cooperation, gratitude, compassion, forgiveness, humility, courage, mutual aid, charity, confidence, trust, courtesy, integrity, loyalty, and respectful use of resources.
4. Affirming the value of local community, with associated benefits of reducing environmental footprints and increasing cooperation between people.
5. Valuing nature intrinsically through knowing that human society and its political economy is an integral and interdependent component of nature and the biosphere. Humans have reverence for nature and know that they are responsible for their impact on the integrity of all ecosystems and the biosphere

These ethics and values provide guidance for a new approach to economics, in the context of different ways of living.

By Dr R W Cartwright

Brueggemann says the story of scarcity is a tale of death. And the people of God counter this tale by witnessing to the manna. There is more excellent bread than crass materialism. The bread of life, and you don’t have to bake it.

This account challenges us to rethink our concepts of abundance and scarcity.

Whether the hungry around us, those who hungry for food or those who hunger for healing and wellness, the hungry who walk into the city foodbanks, the hungry who flock to the worlds refugee camps, need to continue to go hungry.

Is the problem a scarcity of food?

Their and our inability to produce enough to feed the world.

Or is it a scarcity of generosity?

An inability of those with abundance to release some of that to feed the needy.

\$1.00 per day saves a life in the third world. Amazing isn't it – 1/3 of a cup of coffee at the mall.

➤ Does our faith allow us to live a new way?

Everywhere Jesus went he broke the vicious cycle of poverty, bondage, fear, and death; he healed, transformed, empowered and brought new life.

Jesus gives us a mandate to transform life.

The feeding of the multitude is an example of the new world order coming into being through God. With the blessing of the bread and fish Jesus demonstrated that the world is filled with abundance and generosity. If bread is broken and shared, there is enough for all. Jesus engages in a subversive reordering of public reality.