



Make It Simple

A Resource for Stewardship Education and Annual Response

Sharing Enough

Sermon Outline "Lines of Abundance"

Summary

The theme, "Sharing Enough," presents itself in this sermon that describes "lines" that set limits, lead in directions, and direct and focus our thoughts on a truthful definition of "abundance." The sermon proceeds from the writer's thankfulness for the birth of a child, and follows a straight line to the concepts of sufficiency, abundance, and generosity. The sermon presents a challenge to the thinking that may have trapped us inside a circle of fear and selfishness.

Text

I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.
Philippians 4:12-13

Sermon

For awhile now, we have been obsessed with a thin line on a graph. It is the line of the Dow Jones average, and it rises and falls. We watch this line with our hearts in our throat. And our souls—where are they?

God offers us another line. A line of scripture. *Philippians 4: 12-13 I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.* A lifeline from God, thrown out to save us, no matter what direction that *other* line is headed. God's lifeline—God's love—doesn't rise and fall; it remains steadfast and offers us a grounded place to be. Isn't that remarkable?

One of the happiest moments of my life was giving birth to our first daughter. In the weeks before my delivery, I expected a boy. "It's a boy," said the ultrasound technician. "It's a boy," predicted all of our relatives, who had only boys. "It's a boy," said all those people who like to predict those things by how you are carrying your baby.

Of course we would have been thrilled with a son, but the doctor's announcement that our child was actually a girl provided one of the biggest surprises of our lives. And I'm telling you this only because of what happened next. Exuberant and astounded beyond measure by the news that the baby was a she, I proceeded to thank everyone present in that moment.

Profusely...embarrassingly...sloppily...repeatedly. I thanked the cast of doctors there for the birth. And the cleaning people. And the nurses. And the technicians. And probably the gift shop workers. Again and again I gushed "Thank you!!" I couldn't stop myself. It was a magnificent moment.

Thank you! Thank you! Thank you, God, for the abundance, the surprise, the gift of something we never could have imagined. Something we didn't expect. Your love poured out and never cut off. Your providence. Your salvation. Our response is expressed only in this word, in this action of "thank you!"

"Thanks" is not a word we associate with the economy. But before I confuse you, let me be clear. I'm talking about God's economy, God's steady line.

God's economy defies Dow Jones. In God's economy, we are blessed by more than our efforts; and we are called to notice more than our own personal needs. "To whom much has been given, much will be asked."

Our culture measures blessing as money and has completely forgotten, or never known, that it is God who is the originator of blessing. God's not against money. Gather it up. Pass it out. We are living in the story and the abundance that God provided for us. Spreading the wealth, God made us who we are as God's people.

As the church—stewards of God's radically different message—we hold a sacred treasure of truth. To the fearful ones among us who read the daily front pages, to the proud ones among us who promise us that our efforts will bring all that we need—to all of them and to us God offers fundamentally different news: God's abundance is unearned. God's generosity can shape ours. The life at the top of God's lifeline is fulfilling, rich, satisfying, enough.

Will we let God have that much market share in our lives? We don't control God's economy! Part of our anxiety is that we are challenged daily to trust that God will indeed provide. And as Christians, we are also expected to use this assurance as we make our money decisions. So un-American, this believing that we are being carried by God with surprise and blessing! We think we know what to expect. We have our tame thank you's ready.

When we MAKE IT SIMPLE we lean into God's economy. When we lean into God's economy, we MAKE IT SIMPLE. If we spent an iota of the time we spend talking about our money fears discussing the nature of God's economy, we could truly share the gospel and liberate our panicked souls.

But of course we resist this life in God's economy. Our resistance is built by systems of sin and doubt. It's strong. Strong enough that we can only chip away at it together. Strong enough that only the waters of Baptism can wear away holes in it. We can only address our fears and cynicism when we share them with our pew partners. Are we humble yet?

The question that has lived deep in our gut has now risen closer to the surface: Will we face the next great Depression? Perhaps we remember our parents or our grandparents saving every scrap of cardboard, every crumb of food, every penny of their budget. They were plagued by a "depression mentality," we said.

And where are they now, when we need them, when we are experiencing depression and need their depression mentality? We need to learn about making it abundantly simple by talking with people who did not think of simple living as a privilege, but a necessity. *I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty.* God can educate us through their models of simplicity, graciousness, and generosity.

My parents taught me about God's economy. They raised five kids with very little money. They showered us with love instead of stuff, which was not so unusual just a few decades ago. What amazed me about my parents, though, was that they cared about more than our family. My parents tithed, even in lean times. Somehow they surrendered their fears and trusted that giving would never be a mistake. And it wasn't. Later, when I was an adult, they shared their commitment to tithing with me. Firmly they witnessed to me that money was never the limiting factor in life, but instead was the element of life that we were fundamentally called to share.

We cringe at lines that limit us. And we should fear our own limits. Millions of people are starving in this world, in this time, because we were limited by our trust in the world's economy of more and less, rather than God's economy of enough. *In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need.* It is only when our world is turned upside down—for example, on mission trips—that we starkly notice our sinful limits and the grace of another way of being. Again and again during these life-changing experiences, visitors have received the only food their hosts would have eaten that day. It's hard to forget that—eating someone else's food. And it's hard to fathom the generosity demonstrated by that simple act. In that bread of life we taste trust, thankfulness, and generosity.

I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. Together with St. Paul, we have learned the secret. God can never be limited in what God does for us and others. Our limits, our fears, our lack of surrender—they may hinder God's process, and many people pay the price for our failure to trust, including us.

But God just keeps giving abundantly and trusts us to figure out that the store of love for us is never empty. God shocks us by unearthing the graciousness that hibernates deep within us. God digs it up for us in the energy of community. *We can do all things through Christ who strengthens us.* In this strange new-old time, we can "MAKE IT SIMPLE" by paying attention to God's abundance, and proclaiming it by our own abundant giving. Here. Now. Our message is counter-cultural; counter-intuitive. Trust in the midst of paranoia. Believe in the midst of lostness. Give in the midst of losing. Give thanks in the midst of idolatry.

As people of faith, as a congregation of faith, we hold a truly unique perspective on life. God's economy—an abundance that is more than we could ever earn. A responsibility that is larger and more energizing than we could have ever imagined. A message for which the world hungers. A generosity that changes lines and strengthens lifelines.

If ever the world was ready to look at something of substance, to give exuberant thanks for all of life, hopefully it is now. As proclaimers and believers in Jesus Christ, we can be part of the answer and a piece of the surprise. Congregations who share precious resources, because that's what God does. People of faith who have been given the spark of excitement in their faith. People who see that in giving we receive.

Ending 1: *(Use this ending if your sermon will be part of a Commitment Sunday response.)*

Today you have another opportunity to respond to God's lines of abundance. Today you can "sign on the dotted line." On God's dotted lifeline. In previous weeks you have been given both Commitment and Covenant Cards. These simple pieces of paper offer you the chance to share God's abundance in your life with the rest of God's world. What the cards—and the leaders of our congregation—ask of you is your prayerful consideration about your financial support of God's ministry here and throughout the world. And your name, boldly added to signature lines. By your promises, you can show how God's abundance—God's ongoing lifeline—extends into and out of your life for the sake of the world. May God give you joy in your living and in your giving. Amen

Ending 2: *(Use this ending if this sermon will not support a Commitment Sunday response method.)*

So how do you respond to God's lines of abundance? With fear and dread about another Great Depression? By keeping God's gifts to yourself? By hoarding, protecting, and hiding what little you think you have? Or throwing fear to the side of life's road, filling up on God's love, and looking for opportunities to throw God's lifelines to the rest of the world? The choice is yours, of course. God's Spirit will accompany you in this decision, God's word will instruct you, and God's Son will show you the way. You are not alone. Amen