

“Enough?”

I.

It is a nightmare scenario: after months—maybe years—of meticulous planning and massive anticipation, the big day finally arrives but something goes terribly, terribly wrong. The florist is late. The best man gets lost. Your crazy uncle makes a scene. If there is one day when you do not want anything to go wrong, it is your wedding day.

Some blunders are better than others. Minor mistakes can be managed: a slight delay, a few fewer flowers. No big deal. But bungle it badly enough and you bring on a bona fide crisis -like running out of wine. As one rabbi of the first century supposedly said, “Without wine, there is no joy.”¹ Without wine, it is barely a wedding.

What a scene must have unfolded at the wedding in Cana: the anxiety ratcheting up; the rumors spreading from table to table; conversations grinding to a halt without the benefit of social lubricant; wedding guests nervously eyeing their half-empty glasses, turning to neighbors to casually inquire, “Are you going to finish that?” And the families, the *families*, of the bride and groom, mortified at such an egregious failure of hospitality. The whole village is here. They will *never* live this down.

The big day finally arrives and everything is ruined. But that is what happens when you do not have enough.

II.

A simple story –but it plays on our deepest fears. So often we wonder: will there be enough? We anxiously eye our checking accounts, or our 401(k)s, adding and subtracting in our heads -will there be enough? Or we lie awake at night and think of all the things we have to do. So little time —will there be enough? And if you know anything about the recent history of the United Church of Christ—if you have seen the statistics outlining our decades-long decline—you have probably pictured all of those empty pews and questioned the future of this church. — will there be enough?

It is a familiar fear. We know it like the back of our hand. Walter Brueggemann calls it “The Myth of Scarcity”² –that belief, ingrained in us from the moment we are born, that there simply is not *enough* –not enough money, not enough resources, not enough for everyone to get their fair share. From our earliest age, deep in our bones, we are brought up to believe that there simply is not enough.

Our belief in scarcity makes us afraid, and fear can make us do some ugly things. We grab as much as we possibly can. We hoard and hold on to as much as we possibly can. We learn to be ruthless –not because we want to be, but because we think we *have* to be, because we truly believe that we do not have a choice. So we turn a blind eye to suffering, refuse to share our stuff, or even consider the needs of others. After all, there may not be enough for me and for mine. From family life to the federal budget, so many of our decisions are driven by fear; so much of what we do is determined by our deep belief in scarcity.

III.

But what if the Myth of Scarcity is simply that—a *myth*, and nothing more? What if it isn't true?

Scarcity seems to be the problem at Cana. And, at least initially, you get the sense that Jesus would just as soon stay out of it. He hears about the wine shortage from his mother. They have some sort of brief and bizarre back and forth—a reminder, I think, that the holy family had the same problems that all families do—and then Jesus does something surprising. He decides to deal with the scarcity.

He sends some servants to draw water—just plain, ordinary, everyday water—and to take it to the guy in charge of the feast. The servants do so, and the guy tastes it...and it is the best wine he has ever tasted in all his long life of wine tasting. This is some truly top-shelf stuff—so much so that the headwaiter famously remarks on how odd it is to break out the vintage vino after the guests are too drunk to appreciate it.

But note one other detail: not only is it really, really good wine; it is *a lot* of wine, wine in abundance, far more than they could ever possibly need. John tells us that each stone jar holds between twenty and thirty gallons. You've heard about wine in a box? This is wine in a bathtub. And there are six of them, so we are talking about something like 120 to 180 gallons of wine—a staggering amount, far, far more than they could ever possibly need.³

So much for scarcity.⁴

But God is always doing this sort of thing. Long before Jesus, when Israel wandered for forty years in desert places, God fed them with manna from heaven and water from the rock—abundance in a barren place. And in John's Gospel, just a few chapters from now, Jesus will take one boy's lunch and make it into a feast for thousands, plus a fridge full of leftovers. A little mud and a little spit will bring sight to a man born blind. Again and again, in the face of some need, Jesus will answer in an overwhelming way; Jesus will go above and beyond and then some; Jesus will provide far more than is necessary.

Can you hear what the Spirit is trying to say? Maybe scarcity is merely a myth. Maybe, in the economy of God, there is always enough, more than enough, abundantly more than enough. Maybe we do not have to worry after all.

IV.

“Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.”⁵

At Cana of Galilee, the disciples of Jesus have a crisis of faith. Like us, they have been brought up to believe in the Myth of Scarcity: to fear that there will not be enough, and to arrange their lives accordingly. But this overwhelming abundance—bathtubs bursting with wine—shakes their faith in scarcity. They start to have their doubts; start to suspect that there may be enough after all. In other words: they begin to believe in Jesus.

It is enough to make me wonder: What do we really believe in? It is a good question to ponder on this particular weekend, when we remember and honor the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. He spent so much of his life asking us that very question: Will we continue our constant, crippling belief in scarcity? Or can we come to believe—can we come to trust—in the extravagance, in the abundance, of God? Can we live like a

people who trust that there is, in fact, enough to go around? We don't often remember Dr. King exactly that way –but maybe we should.

I have to admit, this holiday bothers me. We so often take the memory of this great man and reduce it to a size that we can manage. We fail to grapple with the depth and breadth of his vision. The Dr. King of popular imagination is a safe and sanitized figure: forever standing on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, forever speaking of his dream of all God's children transcending racial division, joining hands and singing together, "Free at Last." We are at ease with the King of 1963. We are not threatened by his dream.

But Dr. King lived and worked for five more years –five of the darkest and most difficult years in our nation's history. And as he continued to lead the Civil Rights movement, he came to see and to articulate the deep connections between racial justice and economic justice; between our profound faith in scarcity and our perpetual failure to do what is right.

In 1967, Dr. King went to Riverside Church in New York City—a congregation of the United Church of Christ—and delivered an address entitled "A Time to Break Silence," expressing his opposition to the war in Vietnam. Among other reasons, he denounced the war as "an enemy of the poor," draining the nation's budget and denying desperately needed funds for poverty programs.⁶ When the bulk of our budget goes into bullets and bombs, it is hard to believe that we have enough left over to do right by the least among us. Wars reinforce our belief in scarcity, and so we wage them at the expense of the poor. And in April of 1968, Dr. King went to Memphis—where he lost his life—and he went there to stand on the side of striking sanitation workers demanding safer conditions and a living wage for their work. He knew that there can be no dignity for any person denied a fair share of society's resources, no justice in a nation governed by the logic of scarcity.

In his final years, as he struggled to bring forth the beloved community, Dr. King increasingly came to see that our blind, stubborn faith in scarcity is the greatest single obstacle to justice and to peace. So long as we believe in scarcity, justice will always elude us.

V.

But we still fear scarcity. *I* still fear scarcity. If anything keeps me from following in the way of Jesus, it is on my own gnawing anxiety, my endless suspicion that there will not, in fact, be enough. I want to give away more of my money, but then I worry that there will not be enough for me and my family. I want to focus more on the needs of others, but then I wonder who will focus on me. Sometimes I yearn to do bold things, to take real risks, to surprise myself –but fear holds me back. Fear that there will not be enough.

The Bible tells us that perfect love casts out fear.⁷ Fear is the opposite of faith. And so a loving God invites us to ponder the possibility: what if there *is* enough? What if God turns water into wine? What if God can take one boy's lunch and make it a feast for thousands? What if God brings forth bread in the wilderness and water from a rock? What if there really is enough, and what if we could trust that this is true? In other words: what if *we* could begin to believe in Jesus?

That is the question before us this morning. And a gracious God awaits our answer.

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Notes

¹ Despite my best efforts, I could not track down a source for this widely quoted saying. It seems to be one of those pieces of preacherly lore that gets passed around and repeated in sermons on this text. All I can say is: if a 1st century rabbi did *not* say that, he should have.

² This sermon owes almost all of its insights to the remarkable essay in which Brueggemann outlines the concept: “The Liturgy of Abundance, The Myth of Scarcity.” *Christian Century*. March 24-31, 1999. Everyone should read this, and everyone can because it is available on-line: <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=533>

³ Richard Bauckham wins the prize for understatement: “It seems we must recognize that Jesus does not so much meet a need as supply an extravagance.” *The Lectionary Commentary: Theological Exegesis for Sunday’s Texts*. The Third Readings: The Gospels. Edited by Roger E. Van Harn. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), pp.489-491.

⁴ As Raymond E. Brown points out, abundance was an expected sign of the coming Messianic age, as indicated by texts like Amos 9:13-14, Hosea 14:7 and Jeremiah 31:12. *The Gospel According to John I-XII*. The Anchor Bible, Volume 29. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964), pp.97-111.

⁵ This verse is one of the reasons I invest so much significance in this story and see it as an encapsulation of Jesus’ entire ministry. John calls this the “first” of Jesus’ miracles. But the word translated “first”—*archei*—denotes, not merely being first in a sequence, but first in the sense of primacy, being original or foundational (as in the related English word “archetype” —thanks to Angie Witmer for pointing that out). I do not want to read too much into the choice of one word, but it is at least possible that John regards this incident as *the* miracle, the one from which all of the other miracles spring. Jesus’ life, work and mission find their center in the abundance of God. See the entry on *archei* in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Volume I. Edited by Gerhard Kittel Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), pp.479-484.

⁶ This is the relevant passage from King’s address: “A few years ago there was a shining moment in that struggle. It seemed as if there was a real promise of hope for the poor—both back and white—through the poverty program....Then came the buildup in Vietnam and I watched the program broken and eviscerated as if it were some idle political plaything of a society gone mad on war, and I knew that America would never invest the necessary funds or energies in rehabilitation of its poor so long as adventures like Vietnam continued to draw men and skills and money like some demonic destructive suction tube. So I was increasingly compelled to see the war as an enemy of the poor and to attack it as such.” You can read the entire address—still a powerful indictment more than 40 years later—in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* Edited by James M. Washington. (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1986), pp.231-244. You can also read it or listen to it on-line: <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkatimetobreaksilence.htm>

⁷ I John 4.18