

“The Soul of Money: The Truths of Sufficiency”
Luke 4:14-30

I saw this meme a few weeks ago and wanted to share it with you.

Remember: The Bible verses
about a talking snake are
literal, but the part about
forgiving everyone's
debt is just a metaphor.

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Sometimes it is hard for us to navigate the scriptures because of the cultural lenses we wear of which we are often unaware. When it comes to sharing our resources, living with a sense of abundance no matter what the circumstances might be, and prioritizing love and compassion, we may struggle to accept messages of faith about such values when we are bombarded by messages of scarcity and fear. When we get wounded at an early age about money and our sense of worth or security, it takes intentional effort to open up to God's grace to enter into our lives. When Jesus was in his hometown preaching according to Luke 4, he made people so angry that they wanted to throw him off a cliff. How could Jesus have been so offensive? You may be wondering, what did he say that caused such a reaction. Let's listen to Luke 4: 16-21

¹⁶When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, ¹⁷and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

¹⁸‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
¹⁹to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.’

²⁰And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹Then he began to say to them, ‘Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’

At first, the people liked what they heard. Jesus read from their holy scriptures/writings. Then he gave a short interpretation. All seemed good, but when he called out their hypocrisy, things didn't go so well. They did not like what he had to say.

Let's listen to the rest of the story from Luke 4:22-30

22 All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, 'Is not this Joseph's son?' **23** He said to them, 'Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, "Doctor, cure yourself!" And you will say, "Do here also in your home town the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum."' **24** And he said, 'Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's home town. **25** But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up for three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; **26** yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. **27** There were also many lepers^[a] in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.' **28** When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. **29** They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff. **30** But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

There were several things that Jesus highlighted that day as his mission here on earth which would have been seen as a threat to the status quo of the way things worked in his culture. One example of that is the concept of Jubilee, or the year of the Lord's favor. Jubilee was a biblical legislation to help form a community that would practice the love of God in practical ways. The covenant that God established with the people of Israel covered all aspects of life from the spiritual to the most mundane. According to Leviticus 25 and Deuteronomy 15, during a Jubilee year, which was supposed to happen every 50 years (the cycle of seven sabbatical years), the Hebrews were called to practice four things: 1. To forgive all debts, 2. To free all the slaves, 3. To let the land rest, i.e., lie fallow, 4. To return the birthright land to those who lost it. This was a call for a reversal of fortunes to ensure that all people had their basic needs met. This is part of the social system which God gave to the people to ensure that they would live in peace and harmony believing and practicing abundance and sufficiency in everyday life. They had the system of the Sabbath: Taking a rest once a week where all people are equal and can take a break from the cycle of production. Then, there was the concept of a sabbatical year where for a whole year, the community would take a break from work and would forgive debts. Then there was the cycle of seven sabbatical years with Jubilee.

By proclaiming the year of the beginning of his ministry as a Jubilee year, Jesus was calling his people to a practice which could bring social justice to their community, just as God had called the people of Israel when the original Law of the covenant was given to them through Moses.

This was hard to swallow because they had believed the myths of scarcity. They thought their freedom would come only when a new Messiah came and got rid of the Roman occupation. But Jesus was reminding them that they already had the seeds of freedom in

them. God had already given them a way to peace. All they had to do was practice it. To dismantle the illusions of scarcity, they had to practice living in God's abundance.

As human beings, we often want guarantees and controls before practicing something that seems so radical like jubilee. Jesus seemed to be asking his people to abandon a system that seemed so universal in all the cultures around them. How could they possibly do that?

The good news for today is that when we wake up to our cultural illusions, we can see the truth of sufficiency in our lives. In her book, *The Soul of Money*, Lynne Twist writes, "Sufficiency isn't a measure of barely enough or more than enough. Sufficiency isn't an amount at all. It is an experience, a context we generate, a declaration, a knowing that there is enough and that we are enough. It is an intentional choosing of the way we think about our circumstances. In our relationship with money, it is using money in a way that expresses our integrity; using it in a way that expresses value rather than determines value. It is not a message of simplicity or about cutting back and lowering expectations. Sufficiency doesn't mean we shouldn't strive or aspire. When we live in the context of sufficiency, we find a natural freedom and integrity. We engage in life from a sense of our own wholeness rather than a desperate longing to be complete. We feel naturally called to share the resources that flow through our lives – our time, our money, our wisdom, our energy, at whatever level those resources flow – *to serve our highest commitments.*"

The Truths of Sufficiency

1. Money Is Like Water: Money carries your soul's energy
2. What You Appreciate Appreciates: Appreciative Inquiry
3. Collaboration Creates Prosperity: We are all connected

Twist asks, "Do you know the flow of money in your life? Are you mindful of how it comes to you? Are you consciously allocating where you want your money to go?"

One of the easiest ways for us to get in touch with our sense of sufficiency is by staying more connected to the earth and its rhythms. This is something accessible to all of us. One book that has inspired me so much on this topic is *Braiding Sweet Grass* by Robin Wall Kimmerer. As a Botanist and an indigenous woman to this land, she teaches us to look at the wisdom of God's creation all around us which we often take for granted or ignore. In a chapter about defeating Windigo, the hungry monster of greed that lurks all around and sometimes inside of us, she invites us to the practice of gratitude and appreciation of the gifts of the earth. Instead of being so driven by an economy of commodities, we are invited to behold the world and all of life as a gift, where we look at giving and receiving as a cycle of reciprocity.

Here is a video of Kimmerer where she takes us on a walk in nature:

<https://youtu.be/OxJUFGIPYn4>

We will end with a prayer poem from Sarah Are.

But First

Poem by Sarah Are

I want to practice being free.

I want to unstitch my heart
From the edge of my sleeve
So that I can give it a life of its own
A real chance to love and be known.

I want to practice opening
My mind, my doors, and window panes,
Anything with a hinge, everything with a frame,
Until the breeze carries through---
A new point of reference, truth, and you.
I want to practice a holy escape,
Losing track of my minutes that turn into days
Because the only time that matters now
Is time with you and this golden hour.

I want to practice release,
Removing the stones that weigh down my wings---
Stones of fear, shame, and grief,
Stones that build walls between you and me.

I want to do all these things—
Be untamed and wild, open and free,
The first to give and the last to hold tight,
Because gratitude and clenched fists never felt right.

And I am just starting to see
That this life is a river, a holy stream.
And if life is a river then God is the sky,
Touching everything at one and inviting us to try
Letting go of the raft, to float on our backs,
So that we and God can be eye to eye—
A lifetime of baptism and nothing but sky.
But first, you have to release. Amen.