

“Financial Freedom: The Great Lie of Scarcity”
Isaiah 66:10-14

Today we are going to begin with an activity. This comes from Eric Law’s book *Holy Currencies*. We have 300 notecards. I am going to ask three volunteers to come up and take 100 cards each. These cards represent a currency. The three volunteers are rich with resources. If we live the spirituality of scarcity, most of us would want to keep what we have. In that case, nothing will happen -no movement, no flow of currencies. The three resource-rich persons might decide to trade with each other, but there will be no engagement with those who have nothing. What if the new rule for this community is: It is better to have less than the other? What would happen? Can you imagine that? For the three of you who have the cards, as you encounter another who has none, what would you do with this new spirituality? The one with the 100 cards would give at least 51 cards away to another participant who has none. If the other person is committed to the same spirituality, then they would give away at least 27 of their cards. The goal in this game is to keep giving to those who have less than you. Let’s see what happens. Let’s observe what happens. The cards will be distributed to everyone in the room. Those who gave away their cards initially will eventually and very quickly get some cards back, particularly if they have given everything away. Let’s pause the game. Please complete these sentences:

I noticed....

I wonder...

What does this activity teach us about resources and the power of sharing? A lot of problems in our world are caused by our fear of scarcity. Yet, scarcity is a myth. The truth is that God’s creation is abundant. In her book, *The Soul of Money*, Lynne Twist talks about three core myths that keep us locked in an economy of scarcity:

<https://youtu.be/cHKPDV1VYJs>

The three myths she identifies are:

1. There’s not enough to go around... Somebody’s going to be left out... If there’s not enough for everyone, then taking care of yourself and your own, even at others’ expense, seems unfortunate, but unavoidable and somehow valid...
2. More is better ... drives a competitive culture of accumulation, acquisition, and greed... [It] distracts us from living more mindfully and richly with what we have... We judge others based on what they have... and miss the immeasurable inner gifts they bring to life... Our drive to enlarge our net worth turns us away from discovering and deepening our self-worth... The belief that we need to possess [more] is the driving force for much of the violence and war, corruption and exploitation on earth... In the campaign to gain, we often pursue our goals at all costs, even at the risk of destroying whole cultures and peoples...
3. That’s just the way it is, and there’s no way out. There’s not enough to go around, more is definitely better, and the people who have more are always people who are other than us...

The good news is that the Bible is full of stories of people who challenged and transformed this mentality of fear and scarcity. They give us hope that we are not doomed to live by the rules of the myth of scarcity. We have a way out. The prophet Isaiah is one of those people. That is the power of prophets. They see the world through God's vision. While most of the people of his time were feeling hopeless, Isaiah could see the potential for a new birth for his people. This was a time of great pain and loss. The people of ancient Israel had returned from exile in Babylon, but instead of reforming their ways, they went right back to business as usual, with greed and violence as the norms of their society while limiting God to worship in the temple. Even the rebuilding of the temple did not seem to go very well for them. It looked so shabby compared to its old days of glory. The immediate occasion for Isaiah 66 was an economic crisis that was caused by the unethical financial dealings of the people in power in that society who used their influence to grab land and money from others. They manipulated the application of tax and financial laws to get an unfair advantage over others. For example, during times of bad weather and drought, they would make loans at extremely high interest rates. When the poor borrower could not pay the entire amount back in one year, the next year the unpaid portion would be rolled over into a second loan which would double their interest rate. After a couple of years of this kind of interest rate hikes, the poor farmer would be left bankrupt and become a slave to the landowner. All of this was not only highly unethical but also against the teachings of the Hebrew faith as found in Leviticus and Deuteronomy about not charging interest.

So the reality was tough and Isaiah could have just shrugged his shoulders and said, "that's just the way things are," or "It is just human nature and that we are doomed because given the opportunity, people will always choose greed over generosity." But that is the lie which the prophet Isaiah and Jesus sought to expose. Our sense of scarcity is not natural. It is programmed into us. Our nature is actually quite the opposite. We feel joy when we give. And so the prophet calls the people back to their original goodness and promises them a new birth where the city which had become a symbol of exploitation would become a symbol of nurture and renewal.

These words are a beautiful image of a city that lives not by the myth of scarcity but by the vision of God's abundance. Even though that vision has not been fulfilled in any of our cities in the world, we can't give up on it. We know that if we practice this vision in our daily lives and in our own communities on a small scale, it could have an impact on our world in general. That is what Jesus believed. He knew that if enough people were transformed by his vision for the world, the norm would become that of abundance and sharing. It is up to us. If we choose to invest our time and energy into practices that are grounded in abundance, we would live in the joy of God's abundance right now. Just like we had fun in the beginning by sharing what we had, we don't have to wait until the whole world changes before we get to enjoy the abundance of life.

Take an inventory of your resources this week and see how you share them. Eric Law provides the following six categories of currencies we have:

1. The Currency of Relationships: This is the internal and external networks of mutually respectful connections that we have in the church and in the community.

2. The Currency of Gracious Leadership: The ability to use skills, tools, models and processes to create gracious environments (Grace Margin) within which mutually respectful relationships and the discernment of the truth across differences can be built internally, among existing members, and externally, with non-members. Differences can be racial/ethnic, age, gender, sexual orientation, class, political affiliation or just church members and folks in the neighborhood. Through Gracious Leadership we get tasks done in a way that is designed to build and strengthen relationships.
3. The Currency of Wellness: This is about creating opportunities for people to be restored and renewed both spiritually and in other ways. We need to develop this currency in order to help accomplish God's desire for each of us to experience wholeness. Growing spiritually is a key contributor to personal and emotional wellness.
4. The Currency of Truth: This is the ability to articulate individually and corporately the global and holistic truth, internally and externally in the neighborhood, community, and world. Truth currency is in motion, taking us to places that aren't always comfortable; hearing truths that may hurt, and not debating them, or getting defensive, waiting until it is appropriate to speak (if it is.) We must listen to all voices, especially of those who are powerless.
5. The Currency of Money: That is something generally accepted as a medium of exchange, a measure of value or a means of payment. Money was created to enhance human transactions of exchange.
6. The Currency of Time and Place: This refers to the spaces you have and provide for others and the time you give to others. How can we be good stewards of the places to which we have access and of our time and gifts?

When you take account of all these currencies you have, you will see the truth about the myth of scarcity. You will see that in each of these areas, we have the ability to make a difference in the world and to live with a sense of abundance.

I would like to close with the story of John Kralik who wrote, *A Simple Act of Gratitude*:
<https://youtu.be/ga0BNwBHwPQ>

He wrote, "A Simple Act of Gratitude is a book that tells the story of an inspiration, the writing of 365 Thank You Notes, and how my life was changed by the people who received them. In December 2007, I had reached what I viewed as a nadir in my life. While my life seemed full of debts and disasters, I ached for the things and the security I felt I deserved. On January 1, 2008, as this dissatisfaction pervaded my thoughts, I took a walk in the mountains above Pasadena, where I was inspired to write one thank you note a day for the next year. Although it took more than a year to complete the writing of 365 thank-you notes, I continued writing them until 365 were completed. And then kept on. I learned to be grateful for the life I had, recognizing that the love I had for my children made my life already richer than the many people I envied. I learned to be grateful for my law firm, my practice, and for the love of friends and family that surrounded me. I became thankful for the many people around me who dealt with challenges far greater than the ones facing

me, with courage and style. I learned to recognize the many people in my life who had protected and cared for me.”

May God give us the courage to practice each day the wisdom of letting go of the great lie of scarcity to believe in God’s truth of abundance and grace. Amen.