

“Financial Freedom: The Radical Surprising Truth about Sufficiency”
Isaiah 55:1-9

As we look at financial freedom this week, we are considering the invitation to embrace sufficiency which Lynne Twist defines this way: “Once we let go of scarcity, we discover the surprising truth of sufficiency. By sufficiency, I don’t mean a quantity of anything. Sufficiency isn’t two steps up from poverty or one step short of abundance. It 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. Sufficiency resides inside each of us, and we can call it forward. It is a consciousness, an attention, an intentional choosing of the way we think about our circumstances.”

Sufficiency is about the way we think about life. Last week we talked about taking an inventory of our resources according to six currencies (as listed in your bulletin). The idea behind that exercise is to rewire our brains to see what we already have because we forget.

One of the great examples of sufficiency that I have seen on a global level is the Norwegian project of a global seed bank. The idea is to have a safe storage place for duplicates of seeds to be conserved in case of a disaster. Let’s watch a video about this: <https://youtu.be/B95Pem9XW7k>

The idea is simple and yet powerful. It is people using what they have to protect the future. I love the fact that recently Syria had to make a withdrawal from this seed bank. The war in Syria devastated the land and they needed to start again. What I like about this project is that it takes what we already have in order to regenerate sufficiency in case of a disaster! So even with our greatest fears, this practice could help us see the potential for a bright future. We already have what it takes to be sufficient. Sometimes we think that sufficiency takes something we don’t have, but the reality is that the resources are already with us.

This is very similar to when one is searching for an answer outside of themselves, while the answer lies within themselves. They just need some help to discover that. Sufficiency works in the same way. We all have the resources we need both internally and externally, we just have to remember that wisdom each moment.

In our Bible reading for today, we hear a reminder about sufficiency for the people of ancient Israel who forgot because they were experiencing the effects of a disaster. It made them forget their potential. They had been conquered by the Babylonians (slide - image with the title and date of the Babylonian captivity/exile). In 597 BCE the elite of the people of Israel were sent to Babylon by their occupiers against their will. They were forced to live there. But the strange thing that happened to them was that after a couple of generations there, they got used to it. The text for our Scripture today from Isaiah is located in a segment of the book that addresses the people of Israel in exile. A new and unexpected thing was taking place. Under the leadership of King Cyrus, the Persian Empire defeated the Babylonian Empire in 539 BCE and this new king of Persia allowed the people of Israel to return to their homeland. He even funded their return and their

rebuilding projects. He was seen by Isaiah and the people of Israel as a Messiah, a savior for them. The problem was with the people who did not want to return. These were the grandchildren of those who were exiled. Two generations had lived in Babylon and got used to it. Some of those people did not even know the old country. Recent archeological evidence shows that by the time of Cyrus, the Jewish people had integrated into Babylonian society. They had jobs, owned homes, and even lent money to others. We can totally relate to this as Americans in a nation of immigrants. After the first generation, it is very hard for the following generations to imagine going back to the old country of their parents or grandparents. We may be very proud of our cultural heritage, but we would not easily consider actually moving to those countries. And so were the ancient Israelites. They kept their Jewish identity by worshipping the God of their ancestors and by telling the stories of their faith and the days of glory in Jerusalem, but leaving their lives in their new home was too much to ask. The fears of scarcity were all too real for them. Jerusalem was in ruins and the land surrounding it had not been cultivated for almost sixty years. The old days of glory for the old country were long gone. And going back to Jerusalem would have meant a lot of hard work and sacrifice. There seemed to be no guarantees that it would even work. That is why the prophet Isaiah had to speak a word of vision and hope to the people about the potential they could not see. He had to help them remember that their mission as the people of God was more important and even more rewarding than whatever security they had in their new home. He had to help them remember what made them fully alive, what restored them to full life. Life in exile dulled their senses to the mission of their ancestors. The prophet in these chapters between 40 and 55 used beautiful images and powerful poetry to help them remember their calling. In our passage for today we hear of an amazing banquet of living water, wine, and milk. And the banquet is free for all. No money could buy this kind of banquet, because it is the banquet of the Lord. It is a banquet of a different kind of food, not the kind of food and drink which doesn't satisfy our souls, but the kind which nourishes us on a deeper level of our beings. It is the kind of drink which Jesus talked about with the Samaritan woman (John 4) which he offered as a source of life. As the people of God had forgotten their calling to be witnesses to God's love, the prophet had to remind them of their calling and that what might seem wise in their eyes was not wise by the standards of God's vision. These poems were a wakeup call to a people who had forgotten their identity as the people of the covenant. They were comfortable sleepwalking through life.

Living by the scarcity values of the world around us is much easier. Everyone else is doing it and we would just fit in. The problem is that the scarcity values of the cultures around us are grounded in fear. And if we are to live by the vision of sufficiency, we have to be able to look at the seeds we already have and to envision an exciting future. We have to be awake to the sufficiency we already have within us so that we may be willing to take the arduous and yet exhilarating journey of life with God. Even if we find ourselves comfortable in the land of scarcity where we have managed to have enough material wealth and are living like everyone else, we have to trust the longing of our hearts to live in a flow of grace where the image of life is that of a banquet that is open to all. Sufficiency is about living out of a sense of our connection to God and to all of creation. It comes from within our souls. Unless we learn to access our inner sense of sufficiency, we will never have enough or feel like we are enough.

Today we are going to discuss what helps us live out of a sense of sufficiency. As you walked in, you received a quote about sufficiency. Turn to a neighbor and share your quote. Then share what truth it is speaking to you, especially related to one of the six holy currencies of relationships, leadership, time & place, wellness, money, and truth.

We will end with a prayer based on a vision of Julian of Norwich (1342-1416). The context of her life is very important for appreciating her sense of inner sufficiency that came from faith in a very difficult time. She received several visions at the end of a very serious illness. According to Matt Gunter, "Julian had reason to wonder if the world she knew might fall into nothing. As a child she lived through the Black Death, the plague that decimated Europe from 1348 - 1351. Nearly half of the city of Norwich died in a three-year span! The resulting social and economic disruption are hard to fathom. The plague returned, though less virulently, fifteen years later. Some have speculated that she might have been married and lost her husband and children in this later plague. Julian lived during the seemingly endless 'One Hundred Years' War' between England and France. In 1381, there was a major Peasants' Revolt resulting from years of injustice and unfair taxes. The church was also in considerable disarray. In the year 1378, the Roman Catholic Church split in what came to be known as the Great Schism. For the next 68 years there were two popes (and for a short time, three!) claiming authority over the Catholic Church."

Julian's life circumstances were not those of external abundance or peace. But her sense of sufficiency came from deep within. She wrote this about one of her visions, "The Lord showed me a little thing, the size of a hazelnut, on the palm of my hand. I looked at it thoroughly and wondered, 'What is this?' And the answer came, 'It is all that is made.' I marveled that it continued to exist and did not suddenly disintegrate; it was so small. And again, God spoke to me, 'It lasts, both now and forever, because I cherish it.' And I understood that everything has its being owing to God's care and love. We need to realize the insignificance of creation and see it for the emptiness it is before we can embrace the uncreated God in love. In this 'little thing' I saw three truths. The first is that God made it, the second is that God loves it, the third is that God sustains it...God is the truth Maker, Keeper and Lover."

As you hold the hazelnut you were given when you walked in, "imagine God holding all creation in the palm of God's hand; the world God has brought into being...So we pray for areas in our world that need to know the Creator's care. As the hand keeps the nut from falling, imagine God protecting the vulnerable world through God's grasp...As the warmth of your hand cherishes the nut, imagine God enfolding all people in loving care, whoever and wherever they are...We call to mind someone we know who needs the touch of the divine lover's tenderness, and we pray for them to know the enfolding of God's love right now, even as we hold this nut in our hands. We name them and simply offer them into God's hands...Finally, as the nut remains in your hand, imagine it representing a heartfelt longing that goes beyond words; a problem you can't solve, a person you feel unable to love or help, an area where you need to "let go and let God." In quietness, open your hand and lift your concern to God, asking God to be Maker, Keeper, and Lover over this specific issue, and resting in God who has created, sustains, and delights in you too." (This prayer was adapted from *Creative Praying in Groups* by Julia McGuinness) Amen.

"Be a steward of money and not a gatherer." Lynne Twist

"What you appreciate appreciates." Lynne Twist

"Money carries your intention." Lynne Twist

"If you do what you love, sufficiency follows." Lynne Twist

"We create our most lasting legacy in the way we live." Lynne Twist

"Let your money express your soul." Lynne Twist

"No matter how much or how little money you have flowing through your life, when you direct that flow with soulful purpose, you feel wealthy." Lynne Twist

"When your attention is on what's lacking and scarce-in your life, in your work, in your family, in your town-then that becomes what you're about." Lynne Twist

"If your attention is on the capacity you have to sustain yourself and your family, and contribute in a meaningful way to the well-being of others, then your experience of what you have is nourished and it grows." Lynne Twist

"There are no haves and have-nots. We are all haves and our assets are diverse. In the alchemy of collaboration, we become equal, we create wholeness and sufficiency for everyone." Lynne Twist

"When you let go of trying to get more of what you don't really need, it frees up oceans of energy to make a difference with what you have." Lynne Twist

"The happiest and most joyful people I know are those who express themselves through channeling their resources - money, when they have it - on to their highest commitments. There is a world where the experience of wealth is in sharing what they have, giving, allocating, and expressing themselves authentically with the money they put in flow."

"When you make a difference with what you have - it expands."

"We find sufficiency and sustainable prosperity when we think of our resources as a flow that is meant to be shared, when we put our full attention on making a difference with what we have, and when we partner with others in ways that expand and deepen that experience."

"Rather than looking at the unanswered questions, we now need to be looking at the unquestioned answers of our time."

"When we turn our love and attention away from what we think we need to what we already have - financially, emotionally, physically and spiritually - and nourish it, express it, and most importantly, share it, experiences of profound prosperity, wholeness and sufficiency flood our lives."

"I suggest that if you are willing to let go, let go of the chase to acquire or accumulate always more and let go of that way of perceiving the world, then you can take all that energy and attention and invest it in what you have. When you do that you will find unimagined treasures, and wealth of surprising and even stunning depth and diversity."

"Abundance is a fact of nature. It is a fundamental law of nature, that there is enough and it is finite. Its finiteness is no threat; it creates a more accurate relationship that commands respect, reverence, and managing those resources with the knowledge that they are precious and in ways that do the most good for the most people."

"We're not grateful because we're happy, we're happy because we are grateful."

"The biggest, most unquestioned answer of our culture is our relationship with money. It is there that we keep alive-at a high cost-the flame and mythology of scarcity."

"When you let go of trying to get more of what you don't really need, it frees up oceans of energy to make a difference with what you have. When you make a difference with what you have it expands."

"No matter how bad things are at any one moment, no moment lasts. Good or bad, time moves. And so do you."

"True abundance can never come from the doorway or portal of more."

"Money is like water. It can be a conduit for commitment, a currency of love."

"Money moving in the direction of our highest commitments nourishes our world and ourselves."

"Let your soul inform your money and your money express your soul."

"Access your assets—not only money but also your own character and capabilities, your relationships and other nonmoney resources."

"Rarely in our life is money a place of genuine freedom, joy, or clarity, yet we routinely allow it to dictate the terms of our lives and often to be the single most important factor in the decisions we make about work, love, family, and friendship."

“We have to be willing to let go of that’s just the way it is, even if just for a moment, to consider the possibility that there isn’t a way it is or way it isn’t. There is the way we choose to act and what we choose to make of circumstances.”

“I asked for wisdom and God gave me problems to learn to solve. I asked for prosperity and God gave me a brain and brawn to work. I asked for courage and God gave me dangers to overcome. I asked for love and God gave me people to help. I asked for favors and God gave me opportunities. I received nothing I wanted. I received everything I needed.”

“Your relationship with money can be a place where you bring your strengths and skills, your highest aspirations, and your deepest and most profound qualities. Whether we are millionaires or ‘dollar heirs,’ we can actually be great with our money and be great in our relationship with it.”

“When you discard your own pettiness, center yourself in integrity, and reach into your soul for your greatness, it is always there.”

“Money itself isn’t the problem. Money itself isn’t bad or good. Money itself doesn’t have power or not have power. It is our interpretation of money, our interaction with it, where the real mischief is and where we find the real opportunity for self-discovery and personal transformation.”

“I suggest that sufficiency is precise. Enough is a place you can arrive at and dwell in. So often we think of “abundance” as the point at which we’ll know we’ve really arrived, but abundance continues to be elusive if we think we’ll find it in some excessive amount of something.”

“Rather than looking at the unanswered questions, we now need to be looking at the unquestioned answers of our time.”

“True abundance does exist; it flows from sufficiency, in an experience of the beauty and wholeness of what is.”

“Your life is not a problem to be solved but a gift to be opened.” — Wayne Muller

“Enough is ultimately an inside job.” Wayne Muller

“Enough is not only a relationship; it is played out in this moment, and the next, and the next. We can only experience a sense of enough when we are fully present and awake in this moment.” Wayne Muller

“With my cats, I am learning the lesson of the sufficiency of the moment. No yesterday, no tomorrow, only the magic of today, of this single instant. No remorse, no regret, no yearning, just the play of now.” — Jeffrey Masson

"Prayer, meditation, religious rituals, and holy days provided gateways into eternity that allowed us to return to the world of daily time refreshed and renewed, with an understanding that beneath the busyness of daily life there was an underpinning of calm, peace, and sufficiency." — Gary Eberle

"We have forgotten what enough feels like" - Wayne Muller

"If we live long enough and deep enough and authentically enough, gratitude becomes a way of life." - Mark Nepo

"Believing in our hearts that we are enough is the key to a more satisfying and balanced life." - Ellen Sue Stern

"What is at the center of your life? Carefully examine where you spend your attention, your time. Look at your appointment book, your daily schedule.... This is what receives your care and attention--and by definition, your love." - Wayne Muller

"The world has enough for everyone's need, but not enough for everyone's greed."
Mahatma Gandhi

"If greed dominates, the engine of economic growth will deplete resources, push the poor aside, and drive us into social, political, and economic crisis. The alternative is political and social cooperation, both within countries and internationally." Jeffery Sachs

"You alone are enough. You have nothing to prove to anybody." - Maya Angelou

"A bird doesn't sing because it has an answer, it sings because it has a song."
Maya Angelou

"You can only become truly accomplished at something you love. Don't make money your goal. Instead, pursue the things you love doing, and then do them so well that people can't take their eyes off you." - Maya Angelou

"Grace is like a lake of drinkable water right outside your door. But you stay inside and die of thirst." - Maya Angelou

"Life is a banquet, and the tragedy is that most people are starving to death," Anthony de Mello

Trying to be happy by accumulating possessions is like trying to satisfy hunger by taping sandwiches all over my body." - Roger J. Corless

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"PRACTICE Today, wear your oldest and least presentable clothes, no matter what's on the schedule. Notice how people react. Think about what it is like to move about in a consumerist society when you cannot afford to keep up appearances. Pray for awareness regarding your own sense of self-worth when you are not "looking your best." Ask to be freed up from this unnecessary self-preoccupation. Notice how the flowers grow. They do not toil or spin. But I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of them. (Lk 12:27)" - Paula Huston

"Truly humble people are grounded in reality; they neither preen under illusions of greatness nor suffer agonies of self-hatred." - Paula Huston

"The present moment is always full of infinite treasures, it contains far more than you have the capacity to hold. Faith is the measure; what you find in the present moment will be according to the measure of your faith." - J. P. de Caussade

"It is far easier to focus on what is good, true, and beautiful when we are not being constantly distracted by temptations toward overeating; over-shopping, and escapist forms of recreation." - Paula Huston

"What is so readily available more often than not gets taken for granted." - Paula Huston

"Letting go of our demands for total security is not easy, but when we do, the result is liberation on a grand scale." - Paula Huston