

Scripture: Genesis 1:24-31; Psalm 104:24-30; Matthew 6:25-34

Message: So Much Stuff to Share

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A Traditional Folk Tale:

There once was a traveller who came to a small village, tired from his long journey. Near the centre of the village, he met a group of people. So he introduced himself. "I'm a simple traveller," he said, "looking for a safe place to sleep and a hot meal."

"We'd be glad to offer you a place to sleep," the villagers told him, "but we have very little food. Our crops were very poor this year, and there's not much to eat in the whole village. Most of us are just barely getting by."

"I'm sorry to hear that," the old man said. "But you needn't worry about feeding me. I already have everything I need. In fact, I was thinking of making some stone soup to share with all of you."

"Stone soup?" the villagers asked. "What's that? We've never heard of stone soup."

"Oh, it's wonderful," said the old man. "Best soup I've every tasted. If you bring me a soup pot and some water, I'll make some for all of us."

And so the villagers rushed back to their homes. When they returned, one was carrying a large soup pot, another had wood for a fire, and others brought water.

When the fire was going and the water had begun to boil, the old man took out a small silk pouch. With great ceremony, he reached in and pulled out a smooth, round stone. He carefully dropped the stone into the boiling water. The villagers watched eagerly. The old man began to slowly stir the pot, sniffing the aroma and licking his lips in anticipation. "I do like a tasty stone soup," he said. "Of course, stone soup with cabbage—now that's really special."

"I might be able to find a bit of cabbage," one villager said. And off she went to her house, returning with a small cabbage she had stored away in her pantry. "Wonderful!" said the old man, as he added the cabbage to the pot. "This reminds me of the time I had stone soup with cabbage and a bit of salted beef. It was unbelievably good."

After a moment of silence, the village butcher spoke up. "I know where there's a bit of salted beef," he said. And off he went to his shop to get it. When he returned, the old man added the beef to the soup pot and continued to stir.

"Can you imagine what this soup would taste like if we had a bit of onion...and perhaps a few potatoes...and a carrot or two...and some mushrooms. Oh, this would be a meal fit for royalty."

And before he knew it, the soup pot was filled to the brim with vegetables of all kinds—carrots and potatoes, mushrooms and onions, turnips and green beans, beets and celery—all

brought by the men and women and children of the village. Not only that, but the village baker came out with some fresh bread and butter.

And as the soup simmered slowly over the fire, the wonderful aroma began to waft over the villagers. And they began to relax and talk together, sharing songs and stories and jokes.

When the soup was finally done, the old man ladled it out into bowls, and they all shared a delicious meal together. There was more than enough for everyone to eat their fill. Afterward, they all declared that it was the best soup they had ever tasted.

The story of creation is a story of abundance. Of plenty. Of lots of stuff. God made everything. He made much of everything. He made enough for everyone and everything. God's intention with creation is that there would be enough to go around and no one would ever have any need.

That's who God is, a God of generous provision. We can summarize this truth in a single word: providence. It's a word that wraps itself around the idea that God provides, in good times and bad, in thick and thin, in abundance and shortage, God provides. There is enough.

Is that true for you? Do you have enough?

Think about that for a bit: do you have enough?

Maybe this is a question to talk about while you sip your ice tea beside the pool this afternoon, or while you watch the World Cup on your big screen TV in your air-conditioned home, or as you wonder what's for supper. Do you have enough? *(Pause...)*

That's a loaded question. Enough of what? Enough money? Enough food? Enough friends? Enough rain? Enough of what?

But what if we shifted the question from trying to list or focus on what we have enough of or what we could use more of and looked at what we actually have? Rather than try to find areas where we need more, what if we looked at our relationship with the almighty Creator God, who is a God of abundance?

Do you have enough? Always. What we have from God is enough. We have life. We have God. We have enough.

There's another question to talk about while you sip your ice tea beside the pool, or while you watch the World Cup on your big screen TV in your air-conditioned home, or as you wonder what's for supper. Do you have God? What does that mean to you? *(Pause...)*

When we have God, we have enough. In fact, God has made this world with more than

enough. The order of the creation story shows how God provides everything needed for each part of creation to exist together. God's intention from the very beginning is that there would be enough, even plenty, to sustain all of creation. We have so much to share.

But do we realize that we are living in God's abundance? Do we take for granted our comfortable life, that we *expect* it to be good, even *demand* it to be so good?

Joshua Becker, author of the book *The More of Less*, is a writer whose goal is to inspire others to live more by owning less. In an article from March 2017 he writes, "Most of us know we own too much stuff. We feel the weight and burden of our clutter. We tire of cleaning and managing and organizing. Our toy rooms are messy, our drawers don't close, and our closets are filled from top to bottom. The evidence of clutter is all around us."

He lists some statistics about our clutter. While many of these statistics are based on American figures, it helps us think about how much stuff we have.

1. There are 300,000 items in the average American home (LA Times).
2. While the average size of the American home has nearly tripled in size over the past 50 years, still, 1 out of every 10 Americans rent offsite storage—the fastest growing segment of the commercial real estate industry over the past 40 years. (New York Times Magazine).
3. British research found that the average 10-year-old owns 238 toys but plays with just 12 daily (The Telegraph).
4. The average American family spends \$1,700 on clothes annually (Forbes), and throws away 65 pounds of clothing per year (Huffington Post).
5. Americans spend more on shoes, jewellery, and watches (\$100 billion) than on higher education (Psychology Today). (<https://www.becomingminimalist.com/clutter-stats/>)

We have so much stuff. And yet we worry about whether we have enough. We hang on to our things, because of a fear of not having something that we really need.

Some of that worry and fear is a result of the experience of war and poverty. Living through a time of scarcity impacts our decisions to save or hold on to things because we might need it someday.

But for others, living in a time of abundance leads to a perspective of entitlement: it is owed to us to have whatever we want and to have more than we want. And somehow it is never really enough. So we collect more and more stuff.

In Matthew 6, Jesus puts it quite simply and with frank bluntness, "Don't worry about your clothes, or about food, or about your life. God takes care of all those things. You have what you need. In fact, look around you, you have more than you need. You have plenty. So

start taking the focus away from what you think you need. Trust God to take care of you, and shift your focus to what is most important.”

Jesus states this in the context of the picture of creation: Look at the birds and the flowers. They have enough. The God of creation has made a world where there is enough for everyone and everything. God’s intention with creation is that there would be enough to go around and no one would ever have any need.

Starting with the story of creation, hearing about God’s provision poetically described in Psalm 104, we come to the challenge of Matthew 6:33, “Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” In *The Message* it is stated this way, “Steep your life in God-reality, God-initiative, God-provisions. Don’t worry about missing out. You’ll find all your everyday human concerns will be met.”

Do you have enough? Do you have God?

Jesus instructs us not to worry, knowing that God provides. Seeing God’s provision for all of creation around us is a reminder that God provides for his loved children. Instead of worry, instead of seeking to look after ourselves only, instead of thinking about our own needs, “Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness.”

What would God’s kingdom and righteousness look like to the God of creation who made a world where there is enough for everyone and everything? What would God’s kingdom and righteousness look like if God’s intention with creation is that there would be enough to go around and no one would ever have any need?

It means that we will have enough. Enough of what? The things Jesus has told us not to worry about—clothing, food, drink, those daily necessities for living.

In fact, we will have stuff to share, as we bring this kingdom and righteousness into the lives of people around us. Seeking God’s kingdom and righteousness is living out the desire to make God’s presence and creation generosity more noticeable, more influential, in more areas. As we are busy seeking God’s rule, we find that all the other things, the basic necessities, are given to us as well, without having to worry about them.

It almost sounds easy, doesn’t it. Do a bit of work for God and all your basic needs are dropped in your lap. Well, not quite. We must still work. We must still provide for ourselves and our families. We must be wise and practical and use common sense. But our work and effort is seen as part of God’s kingdom, with trust in his providing care, done for him and his glory. It’s not first about ourselves. We cannot think that our own work and life is one separate area where we spend some time, while another separate area is the kingdom of God.

Everything comes within the kingdom of God, and God blesses the work we do for him. All of creation, and therefore every part of our lives, is under God's control and blessing.

We must not allow ourselves to be tied to earthly stuff or the search for getting more stuff. All that we need will be given to us. The generous God of creation provides. He doesn't say he will provide more and more stuff. He provides what we need.

He provides, and gives us enough to share with those around us. We live comfortable lives, as we seek ways to share with those around us. We have so much stuff to share.

But it's not just about those with lots giving to those with less. Think of the story of Stone Soup. It's not about everyone having lots. It's about sharing resources and everyone has enough.

There's a approach to ministry called Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) which operates from this principle. It's not about looking at poverty, or the poor and what is lacking in their lives. It's about looking at what everyone can share and contribute. There is equal dignity between those who have less and those who have much. Each one has something to share and contribute. Together we have enough.

Look at the stuff you have. Can you spend less or let go of some stuff, or share with others, to learn and grow in a spirit of contentment and trust in God's abundance and generosity to his creation? Do you have enough? Do you have God?

Our calling as children of God is not just to live a comfortable life of prayer and worship, waiting to get to heaven someday. God calls us to seek his kingdom and righteousness, to work in this world to restore things to the way God intended, as he created things to be. In that creation, there was enough for everyone and everything.

We live out this calling as a reflection of our confidence that God will provide what we need and what others need as well. We have enough. In fact, we have so much stuff to share.

Praise be to our generous, Creator God.

Amen.