

“Temptations in the Wilderness: Scarcity Mindset”

Acts 2:42-47; Matthew 14: 13-21; 1 Corinthians 13:13 – Tesa Hauser

Week of Compassion

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Holy God, bless the speaking and the hearing of these words, that we might be reminded that you provide abundantly and freely. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Before the story in Matthew, Jesus receives news that John the Baptist is dead, a beloved relative and dear friend. He decides to go to a deserted place to probably deal with the pain and the heartbreak of hearing this news. The crowd seeing Jesus, who had been performing miracles, follow him to this deserted place. Instead of asking them to go away, which he has every right to do, he has compassion for them. I'm assuming he didn't eat before this and hasn't eaten anything all day being with the crowds. So, the disciples are probably hungry when it gets late and tell Jesus to send them away so the crowd can feed themselves. I believe the disciples were genuinely worried about the people and wanted to make sure they went into town to get a meal.

However, Jesus, in Jesus-like fashions, tells them they don't need to leave but tell the disciples to feed them. For the 13 of them, they have five loaves and two fish. How could they possibly provide for all these people? There simply isn't enough. I would agree with the disciples, to be honest with you. There isn't enough food for everyone, and I am not a math expert, but I am confident with that answer. However, in the desert, where options and resources are limited or none, a miracle

happens. God provides in the desert, not just enough, but in abundance through the disciples.

The wilderness/desert is a place of vulnerability and openness but also a place of scarcity. Resources are limited, and you don't try to expend unnecessary energy. When in the wilderness, it can also be a time of contemplation. Everything is taken away, and we can then take the time to examine our lives and see if there are things we want to change, take away, or add to our lives. In our wilderness experience, we may realize what matters to us and what doesn't, what we need to live, and what we can live without.

In the desert surrounded by nothing, we can also be tempted to believe that what I have is just enough for me and mine. This leaves room for the temptation of a scarcity mindset, the idea that opportunities, resources, and successes are limited, so they must be guarded. The scarcity mindset is a catalyst for apathy and believing that all I can do is take care of myself. There are moments and times when this is true and can ebb and flow with the weeks of life. However, for those in need, this isn't just a thought but a hard way of life. Those who can, are called to help those in need without strings attached, to help abundantly. Sometimes it is harder to love care for another when you're personally struggling.

However, there are times when in your struggle it can be helpful to care for others, to love others, to remind you of that love. I imagine that is what Jesus was

thinking that day in the desert when he saw the crowds. The temptation of scarcity mindset is to believe that someone else will help, someone else will respond, or someone else will donate.

Scarcity mindset says, if I even give a little away, I will lose everything. In the early Christian community, we see that they understood the mentality that the story of the feeding of the 5000 plus displays. There is abundance in the people of God, and when it is distributed financially and spiritually, it benefits the whole community. The passage in Acts displays this beautiful life of unity and solidarity. Acts 2:45 notes people sold property and possessions so that those who were in need could have something. It doesn't say that they sold *everything*, nor that they were left without. The temptation of scarcity mindset is that if we give a little, they will come for more. Instead of giving the most we can to provide for those in need, we give the bare minimum. I understand this passage can present a picture of utopia, where no one is taken advantage nor deal with the variety of issues that can be present in such a situation.

However, there are times when we are struggling that it can be helpful to care for others. I imagine that is what Jesus was thinking that day in the desert when he saw the crowds. The temptation of scarcity mindset is to believe that someone else will help, someone else will respond, or someone else will donate.

The people in Matthew had their fill, and guess what? There was still food leftover! In Acts, as I mentioned, people sold property and possessions but didn't stop providing for their needs and the needs of their families. They saw their adoption into this new family, the family of God, and called to provide.

Week of Compassion is an interesting name to me. I know that it's not just a week that aid to our neighbor, nor just A Day of Compassion, the original name for this ministry. I understand the importance of having a set time during the year acknowledging how the Disciples of Christ (Christian Church) of the United States and Canada can learn about and aid our neighbors. Because a week isn't enough, right? There is so much going on in the world at one time, so many people in need. But we know that Week of Compassion's work isn't done after the two weeks of Special Offering their work continues in the background of our lives, in silence, and without acknowledgment.

This is how I see the love of God working in our lives and in the world. There is an emphasis on love in the Week of Compassion verse for this year from 1 Corinthians 13:13, the greatest between faith, hope, and love is love. Why? Love is eternal because it comes from God. Love is an eternal commitment to all creation from God. Love is now and yet to come and is "an indispensable feature of the Christian community of faith" from one commentary I read. We say God is love without understanding that means love was, is, and will be. Sounds familiar right?

One of the greatest revelations of God's love is in Jesus Christ. This means that love will never end, it won't run out, there is enough to go around again and again until we've had our fill.

I am not advocating for burn out or to not take care of yourself and place the needs of others in front of you consistently or cause you to then be in need. Earlier in the Corinthian chapter we see that love is sacrificial and gives without expecting anything in return. What makes love so great is what also allows for it to be abused, and we will struggle with that truth and temptation to do nothing at all or to hoard it all. Still, God's love remains to remind us that there is enough and that we have been called, as in Matthew, to feed them ourselves. What if, in the story of Acts and in this ministry of Week of Compassion, people allowed scarcity mindset to rule? Someone else will sell their property, someone else will give to help our neighbor.

There have been several times in this pandemic when faith and hope are hard to sustain. We hope and have faith that this will finally end, but at the end of the day whether we have faith or hope, love remains. God's love remains; it sustains and provides. When we are tempted towards believing there isn't enough, to believe that I can only provide for myself, God's eternal, and enduring love fights against the scarcity mindset. When we don't have faith and hope that the systems will change, we can show up in love. Sometimes it's all we have to offer, all we

can bring to worship, all we can ask for when we aren't sure what we need. Other times love fights the temptation of scarcity mindset to have us offer more, bring the most of ourselves, give the most (not the least) amount we can, and join in the belief that at the end of the day there is enough.

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