

Abundance, Psalm 128

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Romans 8:32

He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else?

Introduction

In Jude 2, which we have been looking at this month, there are three separate hopes in the salutation -- the greeting that opens the letter. They are translated "mercy, peace and love" with the quantifier/qualifier "in abundance." May they be yours! Aren't mercy, peace and love wonderful things to wish for others, and for ourselves? And to get and give these in abundance! Yes!

We've covered mercy (leniency, compassion, forgiveness, clemency). We've examined peace (safety, wholeness, completeness and well-being in all relationships of life.) Last week we got love (affection, devotion, strong positive emotion of regard, to get pleasure from, to hold dear, to take delight in, a passion), and this week "in abundance." Mykl Bursley is God's assurance that mercy, peace and love do go on and on!

Defining abundance

Abundance is defined as "more than adequate supply or quantity, a great quantity." Synonyms are copious, profuse, and extravagant. In our Jude 2 text for the month the Greek word translated "abundance" in the NRSV is *plathunthein*. It's important to note that in other translations the word is slightly different, usually translated as: "multiplied to you." The concept of the Greek word is more like "added on, a bit at a time" rather than just a massive amount dumped on. Something like "May you experience more and more mercy, peace and love in your life." It's the word used in Acts when the early church was seeing people "added daily." So now we have a quandary. What are we going to talk about today? I thought it was going to be on the abundant life that Jesus promised in John 10:10 where it's written that Jesus said: "I have come to give you life in abundance." Except that abundance is the other Greek word *perisson*. That's the over the top, extraordinary amount that Jude 2 doesn't say.

And then there's the Hebrew! The Hebrew in Psalm 128 doesn't use the word for abundance either, but it definitely sounds like a praise song given to God for abundant living. The Hebrew people were grateful for things that we might not be so happy about. I personally am glad that I didn't have a table surrounded by little "olive shoots," and not just because I don't like olives. Fruitful vine? No,

thank you. My two were plenty. It's called cultural context.

The two words you should know from the Psalm are: blessed and good. Things that we want in abundance are always blessings from God and so very good. Hebrew doesn't use as many words as we do and the word *taube* is the word for good. Happy, fulfilling, complete, prosperous, joyful, pleasing, healthy are all *taube*. And we know that making or being *taube* is also being *baruk* or blessed. So I'm lumping all these words together today to get the superlative, the adjective "abundant."

The blessings from our good God are added on and on, the blessings of mercy, peace and love are ours. We live feeling satisfied and whole and want others to feel blessed, too. That's abundance, in every language.

Getting abundance

I went to my local library hoping to find a copy of a book about getting abundant, Texas is assigned the title of "largest" church in the USA. Something like 48,000 worshippers per weekend. I didn't find one of his books about having "Your Best Life Now," but there is a huge section of books in the business and self-help section about multiplying money and happiness. Spiritual concepts are often brought into the business world. Here are some of the titles on the shelves about abundance and prosperity:

- The Ten Commandments of Ruining your Business
- The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success
- Making the Impossible Possible
- The New Rules for Success
- The Martha Rules (by Martha Stewart). (Didn't her methods land her in prison?)
- Think like a Champ, The Way to the Top, and Think like a Billionaire- all by Donald Trump. (I'm guessing not as many people are checking out his advice these days.)

But then, on one of the HOT days this week I had an hour between tasks, and I went into an air conditioned bookstore. I found "The Four Spiritual Laws of Prosperity: A Simple Guide to Unlimited Abundance," by Rev. Edwene Gaines. It was on the clearance table, and I bought it to see if I could poke holes in its concepts. I found:

1. I couldn't refute her wisdom.
2. She is right when she says: "Life is not about struggling, and being unhappy and then dying. It is about enjoying and appreciating everything life has to offer. Through joy, we glorify God." (p 17).
3. I couldn't possibly cover her ideas for living abundantly in this sermon. We may have to have a series next or a High Point or Sunday class to discuss the book. (But beware- her first step is tithing!)

God has given some very sure directions to us. The Old Testament is all about the covenant that God made with the people. Consider these words from Deut. 28: “The Lord will open for you his rich storehouse . . . to bless all your undertakings -- if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God.” And remember the first commandment is- “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might (Deut 6:5). “The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” Jesus said: “There is no other commandment greater than these” (Mark 12:31).

Jesus also said: “Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions” (Luke 12:15). Rather, because of Jesus, “we receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness (that) reigns in life (Romans 5:17)! Grace over greed. The good things we are given and the good things we give are all from God, who never changes (James 1:17).

Giving abundance

The way to prosper is to give, because God loves a cheerful giver, and we can never out-give the Lord our God. An unknown author has written:

“What, giving again?” I asked in dismay-

“Must I keep giving, and giving away?”

“Oh, no,” said the angel, piercing me through,

“Just give ‘til the Lord stops giving to you.”

One of our members, Pete Mills, said it on Facebook this way: “What would happen if everyone did two things: 1) tithe- 10% right off the top and 2) volunteered 50 hours a year with the charitable organization of their choice (about a half day once a month).” Pete gave me permission to share his words. Pete’s not retired, and has a very demanding job but he believes what the gospels teach -- that we are to help others. I think we could change the world if we all did that. If not radical change, but at least change for the better. That’s one challenge we can try concerning some of our abundance: Give it away. We have a lot to give, even if we are financially broke and running out of financial options. We have the mercy of God, the peace of God, the love of God. Those of us who know these great gifts have the opportunity to give them away, everyday. That’s how to add more of these things to our lives- share them.

The author of “Love Wins,” a book which I’m encouraging us to read now and discuss later this summer, says it this way: It’s- “like when you see something amazing and you turn to those you’re with and say, ‘Isn’t this great?’ Your question is an invitation for them to join you in your joy. The amazement you are experiencing can’t be contained; it spills over the top; it compels you to draw others into it. You have to share it.

God creates, because the endless joy and peace and shared life at the heart of this God knows no other way. Jesus invites us into that relationship, the one at the center of the universe. He insists that he's one with God, that we can be one with him, and that life is a generous, abundant reality. This God whom Jesus spoke of has always been looking for partners, people who are passionate about participating in the ongoing creation of the world (Love Wins, p.178).

I had a faith reminder during this series. I don't think we would have anything, including our own lives, if it wasn't for the goodness, the grace and the amazing power of God. Scientists still haven't figured out how creation of new life begins or how the earth came to be. Life happens simply because God is. And God is anything but boring. God wants us to share what we have out of a sense of joy. We have so much goodness in our lives.

St. Francis of Assisi said "It is not fitting when one is in God's service to have a gloomy face or a chilling look." I'm not saying you have to fake it, but I am saying if you truly count your blessings it's hard to be grumpy. Yes, sometimes life is drastically hard. Sometimes it is appropriate to be sad and even angry. But often we can find something good in every "terrible, horrible, no-good, very bad day." And sharing the good from your life is so much more rewarding than sharing your dissatisfactions. You are a blessing to everyone. It's best if you are a blessing when you come into a room. It can also be a blessing when you leave.

I have another old hymn favorite that was an original at a Sunday School Convention in 1924 -- even the oldest songs were new once. I'm never surprised anymore about what's not in the PC(USA) hymnal. My home church loved this song. It was one of my former pastor's favorites, I think. We sang it a lot.

"Make me a Blessing"

Give as 'twas given to you in your need.

Love as the Master loved you;

Be to the helpless a helper indeed;

Unto your mission be true.

Make me a blessing,

Make me a blessing.

Out of my life, may Jesus shine.

Make me a blessing, O Savior I pray,

Make me a blessing, to someone today.

Conclusion

So what do we know? That mercy, peace and love are gifts from God, and we get these everyday. We know that being merciful to others means walking in their shoes and showing compassion. Being peace-makers means we follow Jesus' instructions for daily living. Loving our neighbors means wanting for others that which we want for ourselves, and working to make that happen. In a life well lived, sharing of our abundance means partnering with God for the spiritual and material blessing of others.

Friends: May mercy, peace and love be yours in abundance, amen!