

One Sunday at a church I previously served, I was rushing through the building in between worship services and came upon a woman crying by herself in a corner hidden from the buzz of coffee hour activity. I'd never seen her before. I went up to her to see what was wrong and discern how to help. At first she brushed me off and said she was fine, apologizing for crying. "Clearly, something is wrong." I pressed. "There's no need to apologize." She said she was in town visiting family and came to church. She motioned around her. "I don't belong here. Everyone's so put together and looks nice. I'm sure they don't have the problems I have. I'm sick and can't work full time. I'm struggling financially and with how to take care of myself. I'm trying the best I can, but I just can't hold it all together." I assured her that everyone's putting up a good front, while I listened to all the challenges she was juggling.

Her story could have been anyone's. Stability is fragile in a place where we're supposed to be more dependent on ourselves, than community, more dependent on ourselves, than God. What kind of a culture or social system expects us to have ourselves all together all the time-- healthy, happy, enough money in the bank, home-cooked meals and 30 minutes of daily meditation? Oh yeah, our culture.

In some ways, Jesus' time wasn't that different.

When someone in the crowd turns to Jesus and asks for some help getting their brother to split the family inheritance, it seems like a reasonable request considering how hard it is to keep it all together. Coming from a Deuteronomic law that gives a double portion of the inheritance to the firstborn son, it seems more reasonable to me to share the inheritance equally among all the children. Then they can individually decide what to do with the assets they gained. But Jesus, unconcerned with being a tool in a sibling feud, warned them about greed of all kinds.

He shares a parable about a rich man. The first line reads: *The land of a rich man produced abundantly*. Not, the man was smart and worked hard and therefore became rich. The land happened to have a good year and the man got lucky and became rich. Naturally, he wanted to find a way to store up his good fortune and relax, drink and be merry. Yet, it's all about him. We don't learn of his family and their needs. We don't know if he has a spouse who helped run the family business. We don't know who picked the crops, sold the crops, had the most access to the crops. We don't know how he came to own the land either, but he's the one who gets to relax and party. In a culture where you're expected to have it all together all the time, we convince ourselves that hoarding, or greed, is a matter of survival.

What this greed has done to the man, is not only create riches on earth, it has made him isolated. And when he's disconnected from the community that gives him life, he's filled with more fear and anxiety and insecurity and competition to have it all together, all the time.

The gospel of Luke is highly critical of the economic system of Jesus' day. It's critical of a culture that pushes us to be afraid and disconnected, one that divides and conquers us, convinces us that there really isn't enough for everyone--so take as much as you can and if you can't get enough you're a failure.

This kind of culture is completely counter to the culture that Jesus promotes, persists for, protects. Jesus teaches that to be rich with God comes from an abundance mindset. Living in

connection to community, living with the faith that there is enough for everyone, that inevitably, we won't have it all together all the time, so we have a responsibility to care for one another, to ensure there's enough for everyone.

Just look at how Jesus eats a meal. After a day preaching against an economic system that leaves the poor to fend on their own, he breaks bread with the poor and the outcasts. He somehow finds enough food for everyone to eat, and even though the people he's eating with are considered the lowest of society, he says you are a valued and loveable human being and I want to get to know you over a meal. Come, squeeze in. There's always enough room for you.

Whenever we gather at the Eucharist Table now, it's not just about remembering Jesus' sacrifice for love, we remember in the bread and the wine that with Jesus, it's a crowded, yet intimate, table. All of us are invited with our real and messy and beautiful selves. There's always enough nourishment and care available. We don't have to have it all together all the time. Eucharist is a symbol for the Christian life of sharing in God's abundance. Where we confront a culture of scarcity, fear, and greed. Where God's mind-boggling gift of grace transforms us, heals us, empowers us. Where we learn the capacity to dig deep into our imaginations and reserves to support one another.

Maybe, the person who provoked Jesus' telling of the parable saw the greed within their question. Maybe they realized that they had a need that they could turn to their family for. Maybe that person had a chance to eat with Jesus and see how he interacted with his community. Maybe they experienced his grace and compassion. Maybe, that person witnessed God's abundance through Jesus and realized the resources they could share too.

We as a congregation, have an opportunity with Eric taking the time he needs to be with Lucy. Not just an opportunity to pour the Bidy family with our prayers and support, but also to care for each other and our community. We have enough people and resources and time to pray for each other, to make meals and fellowship together, to speak truth to power when faced with injustice. Jesus teaches us to live abundantly, and what a season to put this to practice. As I've gotten to know you over this past month or so of me starting here, I've heard stories of your abundant-living already, and I'm confident that the abundant imaginations and hearts and giving will only continue.

Abundant-living can be as simple as noticing a passion or gift you have to share, or being honest when you need help with something. It could mean leaning into some leadership positions or participating in ways you haven't before. It could even mean leaning out of a role if you're finding yourself burnt out, trusting that there's another person ready to enter your place.

I know we can serve abundantly and think abundantly together, knowing that none of us individually has to have it all together all the time. To Eric, we've got your back, to each other, we've got your back. May God's abundance inspire us in this next season.

In the name of our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer, Amen.