

A FUTURE WITH HOPE: FULL OF COMPASSION

Luke 6:27-38

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A few years ago, our church hosted a weekend with Dr. Walter Brueggemann, who is a retired UCC minister, a retired seminary professor, and one of the world's foremost Old Testament scholars. He is still writing prolifically in retirement. He's also a warm and charming person and it was a huge joy to spend time with him.

From him, I first learned to think about the difference between **abundance** and **scarcity**. They are two entirely different worldviews. If we see the world as a place of scarcity, where there is not enough to go around, then we will spend our lives in a state of anxious grasping — always worried about running out, constantly focused on needing more. If entire civilizations adopt a scarcity mentality, one nation and one generation after another, the result is exploitation. Some people use more than their share of the planet's resources. Some people are full of anxiety while having too many things and too many choices, while other people are barely able to survive.

The Bible, Brueggemann says, contains some powerful examples of a worldview of abundance. The Bible starts out with a liturgy of abundance. Genesis 1 is a song of praise for God's generosity. It tells how well the world is ordered. It keeps saying, "It is good, it is good, it is very good." It declares that God blesses the plants and the animals and the fish and the birds and humankind. And the creation story ends in Sabbath.

God created the world to be a place of goodness and blessing, a place where everyone has enough.

And listen to a few phrases from Psalm 104 - a thanksgiving song, sung by our ancestors in the faith:

Let my whole being bless the Lord!

Lord my God, how fantastic you are!

You established the earth on its foundations
so that it will never ever fall.

You put gushing springs into dry riverbeds.

¹² Overhead, the birds in the sky make their home,
chirping loudly in the trees.

¹³ From your lofty house, you water the mountains.

The earth is filled full by the fruit of what you've done.

¹⁴ You make grass grow for cattle;

you make plants for human farming
in order to get food from the ground,

¹⁵ and wine, which cheers people's hearts,
along with oil, which makes the face shine,
and bread, which sustains the human heart.

¹⁹ God made the moon for the seasons,
and the sun too, which knows when to set.

²⁰ You bring on the darkness and it is night,
when every forest animal prowls.

²¹ The young lions roar for their prey,
seeking their food from God.

²² When the sun rises, they gather together
and lie down in their dens.

²³ Then people go off to their work,
to do their work until evening...

A song of praise to God the Creator, who fills the earth with all good things.

And the last psalm in the Bible, Psalm 150, is one exuberant song of praise. Praise God with trumpets, praise God with every musical instrument. Praise, praise, praise. Nothing but praise to the God of abundance.

The laws that are given to the Jewish people are laws based on the mindset of abundance. There is enough for everyone, and it is up to those who **have** to think of those who **don't** have. Take care of the most vulnerable among you, the widows and immigrants and orphans. These are the laws Jesus grew up learning.

He knew that loving God meant loving God's people, **all** of God's people. He taught it, he lived it, he embodied it, and he passed that ethic on to us. It's a radical, impractical way to live, but it's really the only way to live when we realize that we are all connected to one another, all of us human beings...when one person suffers, we all suffer. If we can help someone who is struggling to rise up, it doesn't mean that someone else will have to fall...as if the world were some sort of giant teeter-totter. No, that's scarcity mentality. Rather, when we help others to rise, we all rise. Our passage for today comes from the collection of teachings we call the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus' most important teachings. "Give to everyone who asks," Jesus says, "and don't demand your things back. Love your enemies, do good, and lend expecting nothing in return. Be compassionate. Don't judge, don't condemn. Forgive, give. Love your enemies and pray for them."

All of these biblical passages call us to look beyond our own self interests and think of the common good. When we have safe, just and healthy communities, it's good for all of us.

What would it look like to walk through the world this week trying to emulate Jesus, really trying to cultivate compassionate hearts for everyone we encounter? To look for the best in others, to remember that most people are trying as hard as they can, sometimes with great obstacles and challenges that others can't see.

If you are having trouble moving from a mindset of scarcity to a mindset of abundance, perhaps it would help to remember that one thing we will never ever run out of is the overflowing gracious love of God. The more firmly we can believe that God created the world to be a good and blessed place, and that God fiercely loves all creatures, the more we can embody the compassion of Jesus. It helps us all to be reminded that we are loved, just as we are. Compassion and generosity are born from this place - where we know without a doubt that we are beloved.

And so, to that end, I offer you a blessing at the conclusion of this sermon. It's written by the Canadian pastor Sarah Bessey.

"You don't have to be productive and you don't have to change the world. You're already so loved. You don't have to be smart. You don't have to read all the right books by the right people. You're already so loved.

You don't have to be beautiful and thin. You don't have to be healthy in your mind or in your body. You can watch horrible television or you can be proud of your

televisionless home. You can be artistic or scientific. You can spend your life travelling to meet beautiful people or you can live and die in the town where you were born.

You don't have to conform to someone else's ideas of holy or acceptable. You can be from the wrong side of the tracks or the gated community, suburbs or urban or rural. You can work with your hands and your mind, your back and your brain. You don't have to be educated, not at all. You don't have to have a degree or letters after your name. You don't have to know the right people and boast a carefully curated Instagram feed with the famous and the beautiful and the influential. You don't have to be conservative and you don't have to be liberal. You don't have to identify with certain political persuasions or ideology on sexuality or science or socio-economics or foreign policy.

Your family story can be beautiful or terrible — or, like most of us, a bit of both. You don't have to be a mother or a father, you don't have to be married, you don't have to be single, you don't have to want children or raise children. You don't have to be sober or clean. You don't have to give away everything you own and take a vow of poverty, you don't have to be prosperous either.

You can doubt or feel great certainty (even if that certainty is in your doubt). You can believe in God, doubt God, seek God. You can be someone well acquainted with unanswered prayers. You can carry chronic pain or dance through life. You can be introverted or extroverted. You don't have to love yourself or even like yourself, you are loved. Whether your life looks well put together from the outside while hiding a hot mess inside or vice versa, sometimes on the same day, you are loved. Morning lark, night owl, sinner, saint, child of God, siblings all of us, we are loved.

You have nothing to prove. You have nothing to earn.

Love can and does and will transform us in every way — our ideology, our opinions, our habits, our values, our priorities, our very names. But it's not a prerequisite or a requirement.

Love has happened and it is happening and it will happen. It is kind and patient towards you.

You're already so loved, you aren't earning a breath of love or tenderness more than what you already have just by breathing — just by existing, just by being here in the wonder. Your name is already written in the lines of the hands of the universe. You're star-breath-of-dust, and you are beloved, intimately, faithfully, wholly. It's your lifelong rock. You are known. You are loved with delight and abundance, with choice and desire, with covenantal love.

You may feel it or not.

You are so loved. You are so loved. You are so loved.”* Amen.

“A Reminder” by Sarah Bessey, from the book she edited, [A Rhythm of Prayer](#).