

ON THE GROWING EDGE

Ron Dunn

5) "More than Enough"

November 15, 2015

Using the parable of the mustard seed as our primary reference point, we have, over the past several weeks, been thinking about what it means to live "on the growing edge" of life. We've considered how, in a variety of contexts, the smallest seed can become the largest of shrubs. We have reflected over the ways in which the seeds sown in our past have grown up into the shrubs and trees of our present—shrubs and trees that provide for a vital faith and a transforming witness in the world around us. And finally, last week we dared to dream some dreams together about the ways in which the seeds that we choose to sow in this present moment of time might grow up into ministries that forge a very exciting future for our congregation.

Fred Toney just referenced the question that I raised at the end of my message last week. Is the sun we see setting or is it rising? Are our best days behind us or, are they still ahead of us? I've already shared my conviction that I have little doubt that the sun we see is rising, that our best days are still before us.

Yet, I also recognize, of course, that this is a question you must answer for yourself. In fact, it is a question that you are already in the process of answering in the form of the investment you choose to make through your time, your gifts and abilities, and yes, your money. On this Consecration Sunday, you are asked to make a pledge to indicate the level of financial investment you will make in the life of our congregation in the year ahead.

Over the past several weeks, our stewardship team has tried to make the best case that we possibly could to suggest that your choice to support this church through your financial resources is one of the best investments that you could possibly make. We have tried to demonstrate that your "return on investment" will be one of having the deep sense of satisfaction that your gift is not only sustaining our existing ministry, but enabling it to flourish and grow in ways that are both surprising and, in some cases, amazing.

We all want to be a part of something greater than ourselves, a part of something that grows out of our inner longing to make a difference in our world—our longing to bring healing and hope, kindness and compassion, courage and conviction to our bruised and battered world. Your choice to support this church and the ministries that it offers is one important way in which you can do that.

As I reflect upon some of the parables of Jesus and some of the stories of his ministry, one notable fact becomes quite clear. Our God is not a stingy God! In fact, our God is a God who is, without question, an extravagant God whose trademark is a grace that overflows with extravagant love.

- A tiny seed becomes a huge tree...
- The one seed that takes root and grows yields an abundant crop....
- A few fish and a couple of loaves of bread are more than enough to feed 4000.

- A little bit of mana goes a long way.

Do you see the pattern here? God doesn't leave anyone guessing or wondering if there will be enough. In fact, I don't believe that there is any record in scripture that anyone who chose to place their trust in God came away lacking anything. Time and again, they had more than enough!

In our lesson from Exodus, we see rather clearly the role that fear often plays in the equation.

Some of the Israelites were worried that there wouldn't be enough to take care of their needs. So what did they do? They hedged their bets. They decided to save some of their daily supply for the following day—the Sabbath day—just in case there wasn't enough. But the problem was that their mana quickly turned to mush and became infested with worms. Moses then became angry because the people had failed to trust the promise of God that they would have enough for each day. Instead of trusting in God's abundance, they chose to practice a theology of scarcity—a theology based on the fear of not having enough.

At the heart of the human condition is the deep ceded fear that we will not have enough, that extra precautions are needed to make sure that we will be taken care of. Sadly, this fear can easily spin out of control and consume us. John D. Rockefeller, one of the richest people in the world at the time was once asked how much money it would take to satisfy his desire. "Just a little bit more," was his reply. Here was a man who had wealth beyond measure—and it wasn't quite enough.

The Ring Tailed Monkey is not an easy animal to capture. But the Zulu people have discovered a rather clever way of doing so. The trap that they use is a melon growing on the vine. Now the monkey just happens to love the seeds of this melon. Knowing this, the people of the tribe cut a small hole in the melon—just large enough for the monkey to insert his hand in order to reach the seeds inside.

Once the monkey's hand is inside the melon, the monkey will try to grab as many seeds as his fist will hold. But there is just one problem. The fist that is now clutching all of the gathered seeds is now larger than the hole in the melon and the monkey cannot withdraw his hand. But rather than let go of the seeds, the monkey proceeds to tug and screech and fight against the melon for hours. The Zulu people then manage to sneak up and capture him with his hand still full of seeds, trapped inside the melon.

There are some people who have adopted a similar approach to living. Rather than let go of the seeds that they have acquired, they become trapped by their fear of never having enough. They want "just a little bit more."

In our lesson from Matthew's Gospel, we read of the familiar account of the feeding of the 4,000. In contrast to the Israelites who practiced a theology of scarcity, this is a story that lifts up the theology of trust and abundance. While some might want to suggest that this story is testimony to a magical act that Jesus performed—turning meal for one or two into a feast for four thousand, I am inclined to see it a bit differently.

You see, I don't believe that Jesus was practicing magic. I don't believe that he just waved his arms and presto—zingo—created a feast for the multitude! No, I believe that the true miracle of this story might well lie in the possibility that Jesus enabled his worried and hungry listeners to understand and to trust that they already had more than enough if they simply chose to share what they had. The loaves and fish were but a catalyst to start what would become a “miraculous” experience of sharing—an early account of the first pot luck!

In sharp contrast to the mana gathering Israelites and their “theology of scarcity” that was rooted in the fear of not having enough, this story offers testimony to a “theology of abundance” that rises out of a simple trust that by the grace of God at work in our lives, we will not just have enough, but we will have more than enough to meet our needs. **Which of these two theologies do you embrace—one of scarcity and never having enough? Or, one of abundance and the trust that by God's grace, there will be more than enough?** As you think about your own answer, allow me to make the simple observation that those individuals and those congregations that embrace a theology of abundance are much more likely to experience the miracle of God's grace at work in their lives. Rather than worry about not having enough, they choose, instead, to step out in faith and trust that, by sharing their resources with others, there will be an abundance that overflows expectations. That is, I believe, the way that grace works. It tends to multiply the spirit of generosity and increase it exponentially.

My hope and my prayer is that you will be willing to allow this experience of grace to work within you and that we, as a congregation, will allow it to work within us as we make our pledges for the year ahead. Can you imagine what would happen if we did? Can you imagine what we could accomplish together? Can you imagine the transformed lives that would benefit?

That is, you see, precisely what I would like to invite you to do. you consider the tiny mustard seed and the trees of hope and possibility that will grow from it. Please close your eyes and let your imagination take hold...**Imagine that you are holding these seeds in the palm of your hand...**

- Seeds that represent the talents and abilities that you have...
- Seeds that represent the time and the effort that you are willing to invest...
- Seeds that represent the financial commitment that you are willing to make.

As you think about these seeds and the ways in which you will plant them and nurture them, imagine the ways that they will grow—over time—and become something far greater, far more significant that you might have ever imagined....And imagine, if you will, the ways that our church—the San Ramon Valley United Methodist Church—will grow and flourish in the ministries that we offer and the lives that we are able to change for good and for God... Imagine, if you will, the difference that we can together make as we share our gifts with one another for the greater good of all. The birds of the air will make their nest in our branches and it will be nothing less than a miracle—a miracle not of magic, but of God's generous grace. Amen!