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A Life of Abundance

By The Rev. Sam Sheridan

In youth ministry, I like to think I'm prepared for one of our teenagers or college students emailing me the question, "Why is generosity a virtue?" And my answer would have to be that generosity is what God models for us in Creation, what Jesus models in His life, and that our only appropriate response to the story of God and God's people is to live with generosity.

We inherit a gift from Abraham and his descendants. It is the story of Creation as a gift to humanity. Our story is God making the universe partly for us, to rule with God, in an Eden that is full of abundance, promise, and potential. It's a place filled with grace and plenty.

God looks out over Creation and says six times, "It is good." And when it's finished, or really begins to operate on its own, God says, "It is very good."

This is the root of Jesus' worldview. Jesus sees the world rooted in Hebrew Scripture with its depiction of God's generosity and abundant love. This view triumphs over every system of scarcity and fear.

It's not that Jesus doesn't know about the world. He grew up under harsh military occupation, where families and whole communities could arbitrarily lose their home and land if the Romans wanted to build on it. He lived as a refugee and in poverty. He lived at a time when political and economic power was enforced through violence and the threat of violence.

Yet, Jesus proclaimed abundance. He saw the scarcity and proclaimed abundance. Not because He didn't know about the real problems of the world, but because He was formed by the scriptures which claim that our problem of scarcity isn't really a lack of resources. It's that we don't trust in God's abundance.

We ask in selfish, untrusting fear, "What if God holds out on me?" or "What if there isn't enough?" Jesus believed that when we're deceived into this mindset of mistrust and scarcity, we justify an impulse to care for only ourselves before anyone else. And this leads to anger, envy, violence, and creating actual scarcity.

Jesus was a model for us of a person living a truly generous and abundant life. And even when that generosity was taken advantage of, even when He was ultimately betrayed and killed, all that the selfish violence of the world accomplished was to allow Jesus to demonstrate that God's generosity and love outweigh even death.

Jesus turns death into life and scarcity into abundance. And He invites those who follow Him to participate in the good and generous world God has always intended.

"For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9).

The life and witness of Jesus calls out to us through the centuries, inviting us to live that life of abundance and trust in God even now. His teaching cuts through selfishness and cruelty. His words have survived the rise and fall of many systems and philosophies.

This vision He called the *Kingdom of God*.

When we follow Jesus and trust in God's abundance and generosity, we will find opportunities to live in that promised Kingdom even now. We will share our time, money, talent, and attention. We will be for others the new creation we have seen in Christ.

And together we can know why God looks at this world and decides it is very good.