

Sermon, August 2, 2020

*Isaiah 55:1-5 & Matthew 14:13-21*  
**“Seeds: Growing in Grace: Abundance”**

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We like to pigeonhole people. Now I'm not saying it's right or correct. Just that we do it. It helps us categorize people, it helps us figure out how worthy they are and then how we can relate and deal with them. Now, certainly, it's not a good thing to do because people are individuals, and even if you put them in a category they mostly fit into, it doesn't mean they will fit perfectly into that category. And we always want to treat people as people and individuals, not a part of a category.

But we do it, often subconsciously. We don't even think about the assumptions we make. And, of course, it's also dangerous because we tend to hold more affinity for people in our group rather than another.

For instance, I saw a picture the other day that put people into two groups. Those who panic when the gas gauge is only 3/4 full and those who assume the gas gauge is lying to them and they can drive another fifty miles or so before they are forcing the cars hand. Which one are you? Are you the *we need to keep a full tank at all times* or the *we can go another hundred miles - I don't care what the light on the gas gauge says?*

As you might have figured out, I'm more on the *let's keep a lot of gas in the car* side. Now, not fanatical about it, and I have to admit I like the fact our current car actually says you can go this many miles on what

you have in the gas tank. I don't always believe it, but it's a bit of a relief. So I'm not fanatical about it, but when it starts getting low and if I'm the passenger not in control, I can't help but look at the gas gauge - how far it is to a gas station and at least subtly hint you should probably stop for gas. I just don't like the idea of running low.

And I'm that way with everything. I'm that way with electronic devices, my phone or tablet. I check that battery life. If it gets below a certain point and I know I'll need it later, you better believe I'm looking for an outlet to charge the phone. You better believe if we are going on a trip, I'm asking if we brought the chargers with us. I'm looking resentfully at the person in the airport who took the last seat that has a place to plug in and charge the phone.

Why? Because I don't want my phone or tablet to run out of power. I want it to have the power it needs to do what I want. And I know that it needs to be charged up. Its' power, its' ability to run, is not infinite. It has to stop, rest, and recharge. I watch the gas gauge I take notice of the battery icon.

But that's true of most things in life, isn't it? Almost all of creation needs a period to rest or it will simply tire out and not function anymore. Nothing has unlimited energy to function. Nature has a time of winter or dormancy to rest and get ready to bear fruit. Certain animals go into hibernation or a winter sleep to rest, recharge, make it through the difficult times of winter and emerge when the world is in bloom again. Even we as human beings have a limited amount of ability to keep going. We need regular periods of rest and sleep. Go too long and your body will simply shut down. The battery is empty.

Of course, God tells us this in the Bible over and over. He sets a rhythm by example in the book of Genesis, a time of creating a time of rest. One of the Ten Commandments is to take the Sabbath, to stop, move out of the regular rhythm of life. Not only because God deserves your time, but also because you have a spiritual, emotional, and mental capacity, as well, and if you don't stop, don't reset, you will shut down. You can't continue forever.

I've often wondered what it would be like if we could see everyone's battery life. If you had an icon over you that said this person has this much spiritual, mental, emotional energy left. So I wonder what yours looks like. If we could see it, what would it say? Is yours full, or is the light on? Is your battery at 100, or 10 percent?

If I had to guess, I would say for most of us our batteries are running pretty low right now. As I've talked to people how they are doing, above everything else, I get a sense of fatigue. People are just tired. They are tired of not being normal. Tired of not being in the normal rhythm of life. Tired of not being able to celebrate life with other people. Tired of everything changing every day. Tired of turning on the news and just hearing

how bad everything is in the world. We are tired of just not knowing. Tired of arguing, tired of being judged. Tired of hatred, tired of finger-pointing, just tired.

I get it. I'm the same ways lot of days. I will be honest with you, trying to figure out ministry in these times and not being able to do it the way it should be done is exhausting. I know I'm not alone. I have a lot of clergy friends who say being second guessed at every decision and second guessing themselves is wearing them out. We are all tired.

So what do we do when we are exhausted? Well, certainly normal rhythms are important. Rest, holding to the Sabbath, and worship are still important, even more so in the times we are living in right now. I'd say making those regular scheduled moments that can't be interrupted is crucial.

But sometimes even that's not enough. We worship, we rest, try to have a rhythm to life, but it's not enough. What can we do when it's not enough? I believe we can find some answers in our passage of Scripture from the Gospel this morning. This passage is familiar to many of you, the feeding of the multitude with only a few fish and a few loaves of bread. Obviously, the actual feeding of thousands of people with only five loaves of bread and two fish is a miracle. But there is another miraculous moment that I want to point out here this morning. Jesus takes the fish and the bread, and He does what? He gives thanks for it. Let's not overlook that. Jesus gives thanks before, not after the miracle. He gives thanks at a place where most of us would complain. He gives thanks at the moment where most of us would be longing wistfully for days when there was more than enough. In the midst of what seems like a frustrating new normal, Jesus gives thanks.

Jesus sows seeds of gratitude in the midst of a frustrating situation. Jesus knows that if we only look at what we have, the insurmountable problems in front of us, the uncertainty of what happens next, it exhausts us and drains us spiritually. Jesus focuses on His Heavenly Father and sows seeds of gratitude before God acts. It's not a Pollyanna gratitude. It comes out of an eternity of intimacy with the Heavenly Father. It comes out of His knowledge, the truth we see in our passage from Isaiah. God is in control. God is good God. God will give in abundance. Sometimes you have to sow seeds of gratitude before God acts based on His character and history, not on your circumstances and resources.

I've found especially in these time focusing on our circumstances and rescues is incredibly draining. But when in the midst of those things I step back and simply give God praise for His abundance, take my mind off of what I don't have and on who I do have, everything changes. I see a God who isn't defeated by what we are going through but who will make all things right. I see a God who will pour out on us again an abundance of His riches, who has never failed us and will not in these times. I find that sowing seeds of

gratitude does indeed refill my spiritual tank, does recharge me and helps me see what God is doing in my life and in the world.

Are you tired? Do you need replenished by God? Then today, I ask that you make a regular practice of sowing seeds of gratitude - look not at what you have or don't have, but at who you do have. Be thankful. God will give in abundance. Find rest and be replenished in Him. Amen.