

First Friends Church, a Quaker Meeting
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Why Scarcity is an Attitude
January 10, 2021

Isaiah 60: 1-9
Reading

Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you. Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. Lift up your eyes and look around; they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from far away, and your daughters shall be carried on their nurses' arms. Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and rejoice, because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you. A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praise of the LORD. All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered to you, the rams of Nebaioth shall minister to you; they shall be acceptable on my altar, and I will glorify my glorious house. Who are these that fly like a cloud, and like doves to their windows? For the coastlands shall wait for me, the ships of Tarshish first, to bring your children from far away, their silver and gold with them, for the name of the LORD your God, and for the Holy One of Israel, because he has glorified you.

Message

Today I am led to talk about “Why Scarcity is an Attitude.” I want to make it clear I am not talking about poverty, hunger, homelessness, lack of safety and security, healthcare, clean water or air. Those are not attitudes. In a world, country and a community swimming in abundant blessings, those are crimes against humanity. Scarcity is different.

Scarcity is an attitude and the Light that shines through the Quaker testimony of simplicity is its opposite. An attitude of scarcity is death bringing.

Simplicity is life giving and abundant. When we see Friends whose lives exhibit the testimony of simplicity we see life lived abundantly.

I have a sign on my back door. It is my personal version of a Jewish mezuzah. In Deuteronomy the people were told to write God's commandments on their doorposts to read going in and out- reminders about who they were and whose they were. Mine says "God has provided everything I need. Whatever happens I will be loving, caring, kind, compassionate, generous, and peace-filled for myself and everyone and everything I meet." It is like Isaiah's admonition: "Arise, shine; for your light has come... for darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you... Nations shall come to your light... Lift up your eyes and look around... you shall see and be radiant, your heart shall thrill and rejoice because... abundance" [!]

In Namibia most people I met lived simple lives, but not lives of simplicity. I would like to say I saw abundant sharing but what I saw reflected what I see here. There are "haves" and "have nots" -people in relative comfort and people who live on the edge of starvation. The church had some money in the bank for a "rainy day" but they were given a gift to put in a ramp to allow the elders to attend worship. The gift was also intended to create a job and "grease the wheels" for other projects. There were hungry children and many

projects needed to improve lives and the community. Later the church building roof got replaced because it rained, but only after they received another gift. They are loving, Christian people but the bank account remained untouched.

I am reading “The Heart of Christianity” by the late Marcus Borg who was a prolific author, professor and really fun person to talk to. Borg says there are four meanings of faith- one having to do with the head and three having to do with the heart. The latter includes faith as vision- or as a way of seeing the whole- reality.¹

In faith as “vision” there are three ways of seeing the whole of life and responding. The first is to see reality as hostile and threatening. This causes us to respond defensively, building systems of security and self-protection; protection from the world as well as from God. This prohibits relationships or creates relationships based on power, control, and materialism.

The second way of seeing reality is as a universe of swirling force fields of matter and energy. Elegant and magnificent, it is not hostile or supportive but indifferent to human existence and meaning. Our reaction to this way of seeing is to build up what security we can achieve- while still enjoying the beauty- but

¹ The Heart of Christianity, Marcus Borg, 2003, pg 34ff.

in self-centered ways that keep us at a distance, with passing concern for others and the interconnected web in which we exist.

The third way to see reality is to view it as life-giving, nourishing and sustaining -us and everything around us. It is filled with wonder and beauty, even if sometimes a powerful and terrifying beauty. This is the reality that Jesus spoke of when he talks of the birds and the lilies of the field. God feeds, clothes, and sustains. God sends rain upon the just and the unjust- God is generous.

Borg says this way of seeing reality leads to radical trust. It frees us from anxiety, self-preoccupation, and concern for protection. “It generates a ‘willingness to spend and be spent’ for the sake of a vision that goes beyond ourselves.” Borg says “how we see reality matters, for how we see what is, profoundly affects how we experience and live our lives.” Radical trust creates an attitude of abundance, freedom, joy, peace and loving relationships.

Julian of Norwich, a female mystic wrote about love and longing; not just us for the Divine but the Divine for us. “Love makes God long for us. Just as there is a property in God of compassion and understanding, so also there is a property of thirst... that lasts and always will until we are all together whole in [God.]” What do we do ... when [this thirst and] longing are not fulfilled? Trust. Trust shows the way. Joy can be just around the corner. Hope matters. Julian

recognized love as our salvation. “We can never be blissfully liberated until we are at peace and love for that will be our liberation.” Love allows no room for an attitude of scarcity.²

We experienced something some of us knew was coming- but most hoped was unthinkable this week- the storming of our capital by our own fellow citizens. Shock, disbelief, numbness, anger, rage, fear, horror, disillusionment, disgust, these just begin to describe my feelings. But I realized these feelings are what caused the horror to begin with. And they start with an attitude of scarcity.

Though it sometimes feels like we are sitting still in Covid-19 isolation, the world around us continues to change. All that is happening has never happened before. Our response must be to open ourselves even more than we have ever done before to the Spirit’s leading. To shed an attitude of scarcity and exchange it for abundance requires radical trust; it is what Friends see as simplicity- a non-grasping, fearless way of living. It is freedom from anxiety, self-preoccupation, and concern for protection. To be willing, ‘... to spend and be spent’ for the sake of a vision that goes beyond ourselves, to step out into new possibilities and try new things because not to try radical love is the failure.

² Adapted from Matthew Fox, *Julian of Norwich: Wisdom in a Time of Pandemic—and Beyond*, pp. 52, 40-44, 59-71

We are responsible to co-create with God and each other; to define and build God's Beloved Community in our lives and our meeting, to choose projects and paths for learning, growing and serving. God calls and lures us to experience, bear witness and extend God's love. "God has provided everything we need. Whatever happens we are called to be loving, caring, kind, compassionate, generous, and peace-filled for ourselves and everyone and everything we meet." Darkness may cover the earth and people but this is our time to arise and shine our light, to be radiant; to thrill and rejoice, because... abundance!

How are we willing to spend and be spent for the sake of a vision that goes beyond ourselves?