

God's Abundance by Holly C. W. Aastuen  
Luke 5:1-11 February 7, 2010

This week has been a great week to be thinking about God's abundance. With Dave's car accident on Tuesday, Sandy's knee surgery on Wednesday—successful surgery I might add, Ruth Larsen's passing away this week and Meg's car accident on Friday it was a good week to contemplate the richness of God's abundance to balance out all the bad news.

It is good to contemplate the grace of God when you're in the midst of contemplating why bad accidents happen to good people. It's comforting to think of the abundance of blessings you have received over the years when going through a week of bad news.

As I have been thinking and reading and researching, it has occurred to me that it's very counter cultural to think and talk about abundance. So much around us is telling us that we don't have enough, that we need to have more, that we need to get ours before someone else gets it first, that I find it takes a conscious effort to get into the mindset that there is more than enough for everyone, that God is able to provide every blessing in abundance.

One way that our family has of keeping these blessings ever before us is sharing our highs and lows at the dinner table. We make eating the evening meal together a priority, even though some of us only take ten minutes to eat and sometimes not everyone can make it, we've made it a habit to share with whoever's there our highs and lows for the day.

Someone at the dinner table usually starts it by saying "Highs and Lows," and that is our cue to start telling a high and a low for the day. Sometimes the Lows are more abundant than the Highs, especially on a week like this one, but even so, by this family exercise we are pushed to look at both sides of the events of the day and look for the good as well as the bad the day has brought. It helps us to remember the blessings in life and keep a healthy balance in our lives.

This week, we read from Luke a relatively familiar story about fishing and God's abundance. In it, Simon Peter and all the disciples get a taste of what it will be like to follow Jesus. Jesus shows the disciples a miracle.

"Let me show you the life of abundance I have in store for you," Jesus seems to say and with just a word, Jesus encourages Simon Peter to fish out in the deep. The catch is so overwhelmingly that they need everyone's strength to pull it all in. They are blessed with material abundance—enough fish caught for these fishermen to sell and live well off the proceeds. It's as if they had won the lottery with one simple flick of a fisherman's wrist. There will be much feasting and rejoicing in Galilee.

But with the evidence of this abundant catch, Peter's eyes are opened to an even greater abundance. It is what made him fall to his knees and confess his sinful nature. It is what made him even fearful of what might happen next.

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And Jesus says to him, "There is nothing to fear. From now on you'll be fishing for men and women." And they pulled their boats up on the beach, leaving the abundance of wealth still wriggling in the nets, turned their backs on that old life and followed the new abundance of Jesus Christ. Even at this early point in their relationship with Jesus, they had seen enough to know what following Jesus was worth.

They had found their purpose in life. And that had made all the difference in the world.

Viktor Frankl was a Viennese psychiatrist who survived Auschwitz and wrote about his experience in the book *Man's Search for Meaning*.

He observed that when men and women live without hope, when life has no meaningful goal, life begins to dissolve, strength is weakened and one's will to live is diminished.

The key to having a will to live was to have a goal, however modest, that guided your days. The goal could be something as simple as helping this man or bringing comfort to this woman. Those who found this purpose in life lived longer and fuller lives because of their goal setting. They seemed to live more fully, talking with one another and remembering to write poetry and to gather to sing songs.

There is something about knowing what you need to do—knowing what your work is—that adds spiritual depth to life, regardless of the circumstances in which it is being lived.

Even in the Bible story, the abundance of Peter's catch made Peter and all those around him band together for a common goal of bringing all the fish to shore. Even that modest goal, along with the leading of Christ, resulted in changed hearts.

We need to find ways to dwell in God's abundance not only for ourselves but for the sake of others. God wants us to follow and live in God's abundance, not necessarily material or financial abundance, although that may also be true, but in the abundance of God's love.

The story in Luke of the overflowing fish catch reminds us to take time to really see what God is up to, to have eyes to see the miracles around us. We need to cast our nets into deeper waters, to move God-ward so that we can be open and ready for any blessings sent our way. And then we need to follow God, leaving behind the familiar, to try something new.

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There was once a cartoon in the New Yorker magazine with a caption that read: "This morning opportunity knocked at my door, but by the time I pushed back the bolt, turned the two locks, unlatched the chain and shut off the alarm system it was gone."

What are we doing that shuts out opportunity? What barriers do we erect against the Holy Spirit?

Because if you really think about it, fish weren't the only things that were caught that day. Simon Peter and his friends were hooked. And though the miracle was what got their attention, they moved beyond their awe of the spectacular into meaningful ministry through the guidance of Jesus Christ.

And it wasn't always easy.

A colleague in Kentucky writes about an experience she has had. It's an extended story, but I think it illustrates what we're talking about today:

*A church I know wanted to fish for people, and they looked around to see where Jesus was inviting them to throw their nets. They saw that a lot of children in the free lunch program at...school didn't eat well when school wasn't in session. So the church partnered with a local agency to provide bag lunches five days a week in the summer months. The agency provided the funding; the church provided the volunteers. At the beginning, things were fine. A few children came in each day; a couple of volunteers made sandwiches and assembled the bags. Soon the volume increased...More volunteers were needed and more food.*

*Then the volunteers...started purchasing healthy food on their own, because the agency had limited funds. They added milk and fresh fruit and more children came with their families in tow.*

*...The agency pulled the plug on the funding because other sites around the county couldn't afford the extra items and the agency didn't believe it was fair for one site to offer more than the others. The church was devastated...The cost of the program was too much for them to manage without the agency's help...*

*Over time the church regrouped, faced the reality of the situation...and began casting about for where Jesus might be telling them to throw their nets next...*

*They contacted another agency and the local food pantry. Together, the three of them began offering a regular program where adult food pantry clients came to the church kitchen, received a bag of groceries and a free (kitchen) gift and had a cooking and nutrition lesson from a dietician, using the items in the bag. They sat down to a meal together, then took the groceries home to replicate the meal for their families.*

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*This wasn't at all what the church had in mind when they participated in the first food program. Instead of children, they had adults. Instead of summer, it was year-round. Instead of making sandwiches...the guests were learning to cook...*

*It wasn't at all what they had in mind.*

*But when you go fishing with Jesus, you never know what you'll catch. (story told by Melissa Bane Sevier, pastor of Versailles Presbyterian Church, Versailles, KY)*

When you go fishing with Jesus, you never know what you'll catch.

May we 'go fishing with Jesus,' sharing the abundance of God with others. God's love and grace are so abundant as to be inexhaustible and the more we fully realize that, the more we will joyfully seek to share that abundance with others. May we never tire of the sharing.