

09.21.25 ~ Pentecost 15
“Scarcity, Sufficiency, or Surplus?”
The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

Genesis 14:17-20 ^{NIV}

¹⁷ After Abram returned from defeating Kedorlaomer and the kings allied with him, the king of Sodom came out to meet him in the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King’s Valley).

¹⁸ Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, ¹⁹ and he blessed Abram, saying,

“Blessed be Abram by God Most High,
Creator of heaven and earth.

²⁰ And praise be to God Most High,
who delivered your enemies into your hand.”

Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything.

Leader: These Are Words from God.

People: Thanks be to God!

Philippians 4:10-13 ^{NLT}

Paul’s Thanks for Their Gifts

¹⁰ How I praise the Lord that you are concerned about me again. I know you have always been concerned for me, but you didn’t have the chance to help me. ¹¹ Not that I was ever in need, for I have learned how to be content with whatever I have. ¹² I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. ¹³ For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength.

Leader: These Are Also Paul’s Words of Stewardship.

All: Thanks be to God!

Please pray with me:

Generous God, we thank you for this season of change and possibility. We sometimes dread the approaching cold weather and shorter days, but know the beauty of autumn will lift our spirits as the crisp cool mornings quicken our steps. September is also a time for envisioning the following year and necessary budget planning. We thank you for this worship time together for music, prayer, and Scripture. We ask you to focus our minds on these areas, so that we may hear your teaching, direction, and inspiration. Speak to us this morning through my words as we seek you. Thank you for your love and generous provision. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

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Do you recall a key phrase from last week? “The solution is in the silence.” Have you been able to practice more silence this week? I’m not speaking of isolation or loneliness, but of intentional and contemplative time of not speaking aloud. No background TV or radio. A specific time

of thinking or daydreaming, listening or centering prayer, or a time of quiet rest after a busy day. We know silence and meditation are two of the twelve Spiritual Disciplines identified by Richard J. Foster in his 1978 classic book, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*. I get my best deep silent work done between 5 and 7 am and then again between 4 and 6 pm. Both are best for ideas, thinking, planning, praying, and writing. If you are head of a team or church committee, please use your best silent time to listen for God's plans for our church and its ministries over the next few weeks. Let's not think of budget preparation as a dreaded "to-do" item on your checklist but as a visioning time. We have resources and assets! Property, building, space, parking, greenery, trees, flower beds, congregants, community connections, generous hearts, a food mission, sandwich ministry, a daycare, Mission Center partners, savings, wonderful musicians, instruments, worship, Hymnals, Bibles, a church kitchen, a gym, a library refresh in progress, some accessibility, ramps, and an elevator. Those are more than sufficient to build or grow a church! We have a surplus, folks! Not scarcity.

True that, recently, in my Building and Grounds reports, I've been focusing on what we don't have: for example, what's needed like people, staff, time, a new roof, fence, or what's broken and in need of repair, painting, or sprucing up. I'm sorry to say that thinking comes from a scarcity mindset and not from God's abundant overflow that Jesus guarantees. I commit to you to re-focus on sufficiency and surplus!

Many of us here as well as our culture and peers have lived in times of want or lack. Some of you experienced the Wall Street Crash and Great Depression of 1929 that lasted into the 1930's, or World War II and

rationing campaigns. Numerous recessions, joblessness, RIFS (reductions in Force), political and cultural conflicts, race riots of the Sixties, inflation, and for some, personal poverty have all shaped our limited perspectives. Many though have also been blessed by having homes, cars, appropriate clothing, education, pensions, retirement savings, insurance, children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren! Most of us would say that sufficiency overcame scarcity; my childhood was lean, but I never knew that my mom struggled as much as she did to make ends meet or that she wrote a check for \$5.00 a month to pay off store credit. It seemed like we always had enough for ourselves, extended family, friends, or neighbors. As challenging as your past was or these times are, let us reflect on the good and sufficient love and provision our Savior Jesus Christ embodies for all eternity. That gift is priceless!

During budget prep, yes, we must decide how we'll prepare and pay for things needed, but also how we can share Jesus' generosity for the ministries and missions that God is calling us to support or initiate. Our financial reports show how frugal we have been and that is commendable; we have worked hard to use and repurpose all that we have, but we need more help to do so. It starts with prayer, surrender, listening, silence, courage, and even fortitude. God provided and is still providing resources to sustain us, so how then shall we be the church in 2026? What, where, how, and why will we spend those generous, renewable resources? As we struggle to deal with circumstances of today—death, illness, violence, tragedies—let us ponder how can you help us find people who need Jesus. Are you tithing your time, talents, and resources? You may feel a lack of energy or physical ability to pull weeds in the front bed or

decorate a Christmas tree, but perhaps you could read a story to the Daycare or Food Mission children? Perhaps you could join Carol, Roudaina, and myself sorting through various donations, finding the best way to share them with others? Perhaps you could help with sandwiches once a month or the food mission. What are your ideas? For those who still use cash when shopping, should you start a “penny jar,” or these days, a “quarter collection jar” for the church? We have fixed operating expenses that are going up, just like you do at home: electricity, gas, trash collection, telephone, IT management, insurance, wages, etc. And we have variable costs that are harder to predict but increase as we do more of God’s mission work and marketing to grow as a church. The more people coming and going will increase our costs accordingly: custodial, maintenance, furniture, carpet replacement, equipment usage and replacement, labor, service calls, and more. Some institutional expenses are almost invisible despite our transparency, like fire and elevator permits, worship licensing, piano tuning, supplies, bank fees, web hosting, email security, and more. We are extremely cautious in our spending, but we need more income, whether that comes from church growth or mission center events and partners. Hear me say that I am **not** concerned, but I need your prayers and outreach to help grow our church. No pastor can do this alone; it is a body of believers’ vision and activity.

In our first passage, Genesis 14 records the first war in the Bible. Abram intervenes and wins a victory over four regional kings of Sodom and Gomorrah, who had taken his nephew Lot and all his possessions. Abram’s victory is credited to “God Most High ([vv.19, 20](#))” by Melchizedek, king of Salem (Jerusalem), who greets Abram with a

blessing. Melchizedek's name means "king of righteousness," so Abram considered him his superior, even though God has just showed Abram his future legacy and covenant. Abram respectfully gave him 1/10th of all he had in gratitude for the king's blessing. This was not a conditional offering, but a reciprocal one. Abram chose to bless the Lord for this victory by giving his tithe to a man of God in authority. When we graciously receive God's blessings, giving back generously builds a hedge of protection around us spiritually, morally, and ethically through God's grace.

The apostle Paul knew this and that is the context for the second passage in Philippians. Paul's letter is not scolding the new church but rather thanking them for their continued support. He acknowledges their love and generous spirits but realizes that some circumstance prevented their financial care. He had not specifically asked for their help but had prayed to God to meet his needs. He assures them that his joy and contentment are not dependent upon their ability to assist him because it is through Christ that his scarcity turned to sufficiency. His testimony is what is important here, not the amount given. Isn't that true for us as well? If we work in a job we are called to, it does not feel like work at all, and even in times of lack, we make do. This is counter-cultural for certain in our time of entitlement. Let us think of our church life as our new work life; one commentary, The Theology of Work project, explains:

Paul says that our work is not the result of *our own* effort, but that *God's* work in us is what gives us our energy. What we do in life, including on the job, is an expression of God's saving work in Christ. Moreover, we find the strength for this effort by the power of God within us. Christ's work is to serve people ([Mark 10:35](#)), and God

empowers us to serve alongside him. ([Theology of Work Project](#), Copyright © 2014 Theology of Work Project, Inc.)

Sufficiency used in cultural terms is defined as self-reliance, but in economics, it means an adequate supply or provision. And for that, our church resources are sufficient, but God promises a surplus, more than what is needed or used, an excess. Now, as a church, we do have more than we need in savings, but it is targeted and not yet designated how the “surplus” is to be utilized. So that is your assignment for this week. Practice times of silence to ponder and listen for God’s direction not for what you want to spend money on, but how God could have us better serve this diverse community for his Kingdom work. I’ll be handing out paper next week to collect your ideas. As I asked last week, why do we have anxiety when we have Jesus?! We give back because we are given so much, physically and spiritually. We are given salvation that guarantees eternal life! That is the sufficiency **and** the surplus. Amen? Amen. ||

Let us pray. Dear Lord, we will pray for your stewardship direction. Help us to boldly share what you have provided us with generosity and responsible discernment. As we reflect on our faith and relationship with you, help us dive into your Word in Scripture, praying for ideas and gratitude for your abundance. Let us revel in your generous love and provision as we share what we have with others. It is in your name, we pray, Amen.