

Sermon Notes – June 11, 2017

“A Life of Abundance”

Michael Webster

- OK, so here we are, at the fourth of my five favs. First, we had words to live by from Micah 6: Do justice, love kindness, walk humbly with your God. Then Jeremiah at the potter’s house, and God says, “I will change my mind.” That was free will. Then Jeremiah 31, when God says, “I will write my law upon their hearts.” That was God’s promise to us of spiritual transformation. And today we have a gospel reading about abundant life.
- I like this passage so much I asked Carrie to read it twice. The first reading, from the NRSV, is one that does a good job of accurately translating the original language.
- The second, from the *The Message*, does a good job of conveying the meaning of the text in modern language. For example, Jesus is portrayed as saying that being hard-hearted can boomerang on us.
- I can pretty much guarantee that neither Jesus nor his first-Century Mediterranean audience had any knowledge of Australian aboriginal hunting tools. But we all understand what it means for hard-heartedness to boomerang on us. So in that second translation, it’s not what Jesus said, it’s what Jesus meant.
- Friday was a Professional Development Day for teachers, and as always on such days, Darren and some brave volunteers ran a day program for schoolchildren.
- I’m told that someone brought apple sauce for the kids’ snack time, and that the kids were not in the least interested in eating it. And you know, you can tell those kids all day long how nutritious apple sauce is, and how good it tastes and how good it is for them, but if they’re not interested, they’re just not interested.
- The way this reading starts can be a bit like that applesauce. Don’t judge others. Don’t condemn them. Instead, forgive. Be a giver, not a getter. Maybe that is good for us, but who’s going to line up for seconds of that applesauce?

- Don't judge, says the NRSV; Don't pick on people, says The Message. Either way you put it, it's about being generous in the way we see others.
- The NRSV says, don't condemn others; The Message says, don't criticize their faults. One way or the other, it's about showing compassion.
- Forgive, says the NRSV; Be easy on people, says The Message. It doesn't matter how you say it, forgiveness is forgiveness.
- Generosity, compassion, forgiveness. We know these are good qualities, especially if other people extend them to us. It's great to be on the receiving end of generosity, of compassion, of forgiveness.
- Last week, I said that our job, as people of faith, is to treat others the way God treats us. And here we have a pretty good start: generosity, compassion, forgiveness. Why bother? Why be givers of generosity, compassion and forgiveness when we could sit back and hope to receive them? Because someone has to be a giver, and if not us, if not people of faith, then who?
- But, some would say, doesn't that make us doormats? Won't we be taken advantage of? Instead of giving all the time, shouldn't we be doing some getting, like everybody else? Aren't we going to fall behind? Aren't our lives going to be impoverished by all this giving?
- No, says Jesus, just the opposite. By giving, our lives will be enriched. What we give in generosity, compassion and forgiveness will be returned to us in full measure – pressed down, shaken together and running over.
- Let me show you what that looks like ...
- Stephen Covey was an educator and business writer who is best known for his 1989 book *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. In Chapter 4, "Think Win-Win," he describes the difference between a scarcity mindset and an abundance mindset. The scarcity mindset thinks, if someone else wins, that means I lose. The abundance mindset thinks there are enough successes to share, and enough resources too. He stresses that an abundance mindset is not about being "nice." Instead, he writes, it is "a character-based code for human interaction and collaboration."
- On this, Covey and Jesus agree. People of character, people of faith, live in a world of abundance, not scarcity. People of character and faith can afford to dispense generosity, compassion and forgiveness because they know they are renewable resources that are not in short supply. And that the more they

give, the more they get by way of fullness of life – pressed down, shaken together, running over.

- Sometimes it's difficult to recognize abundance, even when we're in the middle of it. Don Larsen's perfect game ...
- That iconic moment when Yogi Berra jumped into Don Larsen's arms ...
- And sometimes we find abundance where we least expect it. Stephen Covey, for example, grew up dedicating himself to athletics. In high school, when a hip problem derailed his plan to be a professional athlete, he was initially devastated. But then he committed himself to academics and found an outlet for his competitive spirit in the debating club. His thinking on education and character has influenced the lives of millions.
- A little boy named William was the son of a bankrupt butcher and an illiterate mother. It sounds like a recipe for a life of scarcity, but in the world of theatre, William Shakespeare found abundance.
- Maria was born in Poland to a family so poor she couldn't afford to get married. Her mother died when she was 10, and Maria herself suffered from depression. Still, Marie Curie found abundance in the sciences and to this day is the only person to receive the Nobel Prize for work in two different fields.
- And so it goes. Many of you have your own stories illustrating that scarcity and abundance are not about how our circumstances look to the outside world, but about how we see ourselves. Will we live a life of scarcity, or will we live a life of abundance?
- That's a question that confronts this congregation right now. Your main preacher is retiring at the end of the month.
- It was said last night that the next preacher has some big shoes to fill. My response to that is No, I'm taking my shoes with me. The next person will bring their own shoes, and their feet will fill them nicely.
- It's gratifying that so many of you seem sorry to see me go. But is this a time to retreat into scarcity or to step forward in abundance? I had an opportunity once to talk with Ken Wotherspoon, St. Martin's first ordained minister. He said to me, this congregation always seems to find the minister it needs. That's not scarcity talking, that's abundance.

- As it was when I came here, St. Martin's is thriving and active and committed to making a difference in our community and in the world.
- In all of SK, only one or two United Churches will have an attendance to match ours this morning. We have an abundance of people and of resources and of commitment. And we have a history of using them wisely and effectively.
- So I encourage you in the days and months ahead not to get Jesus' image of the full measure turned around, not to let discouragement press you down, not to be shaken by unsettling events, not to be overrun by worries and concerns.
- Instead I urge you to continue to be outward-looking and forward-looking, to be generous, compassionate and forgiving. In doing so, says Jesus, "You'll find life given back, but not merely given back – given back with bonus and blessing, a good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over."