

CASHMERE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH - Sunday 28 October 2018

Barbara Sampson

I need to start with a confession. No, I haven't become an axe murderer since I was here last and I'm not planning on robbing a bank. But I have been doing battle with something for a long, long time, probably 50 years or more, in fact. My battle is with 'enough'.

Have I done enough, prayed enough, read enough, prepared for this service well enough? And what it really comes down to is - Am I enough?

Recently it set me thinking about the expression of our faith in the world today, and whether we live with a sense of scarcity or abundance. Do we see God as big, able, vastly able to provide for our deepest needs and the most intimate longings of our hearts? Or do we look on God as not much bigger than ourselves and only now and again really able to provide what we need or ask him for?

And the question is also linked with how we see ourselves. Are you and I enough and do we have enough of what we would call necessities to live in this day and age? I don't just mean outer necessities like food and a warm house and a group of people we can call friends. I also mean the inner necessities like resilience, good humour, strength of character. And of course as Christians do we have enough active faith and enough trust in a God who is more-than-enough. Or is there always a lack within us, a not-quite-enoughness in one or more of these areas that drags and holds us down?

When Jesus was speaking to the woman at the well, as recorded in John 4, he spoke about living waters. He said 'Everyone who drinks this well water will get thirsty again. But whoever drinks the water I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water I give will become a spring of water welling up to eternal life.'

One of the modern Bible translators puts it this way, "an artesian spring within, gushing fountains of endless life". What a gift. Is that how we live? Or would our lives of faith be more accurately described as a dripping tap or, worse still, a dried up stream?

Do we live with a God of abundance - always more than enough - or deficit - never quite enough? Are our lives of faith like a river in overflow, or more likely overwhelmed? Is our glass, referring to ourselves and to God, half full or half empty?

We are going to take a look at three different cameos of Scripture - three quick stories - that speak about scarcity and abundance and then we will come back to these questions - Is God enough, and am I enough?

1. Numbers 13 has the story of spies going into promised land. Moses sends them to check out the land, to see if it is populated and whether the people who live there are strong or weak, few or many. Is the land good or bad? Are their towns unwalled or fortified? Is the soil fertile or poor? What trees grow there? What kinds of fruit do they produce?

Most of the spies come back saying the people there are huge, like giants, too big to tackle. But two of the spies who knew something of God's enoughness come back saying, They're big, for sure, too big to miss. They may be sizeable but our God is even bigger.

2. In Luke 21: 1-4 we are told how Jesus is sitting in the part of the temple where people bring their offerings. He sees a woman, described as a poor widow and her offering. Observers called it 'measly'. But Jesus says she has given 'extravagantly' in fact, more than others who out of their wealth, had creamed off the top and tossed their offering into the temple offering boxes with a great display. Round bell of the trumpet shaped offering receptacles meant that money tossed in made a noise. The wealthy with their large offerings

would make lots of noise. Clatter, clatter, clatter. The poor widow's 'measly' offering made scarcely a tinkle.

But Jesus, sitting over from the spot saw the woman, saw her offering, and more than that, he saw her heart. As a widow, and a poor widow at that, with no DPB, no regular superannuation payments into her bank account, no winter heating allowance, she was tossing in her last piece of security as an expression of worship, gratitude and trust that God to whom she had given all she had, would provide for her needs. So he called her offering extravagant.

The thing is that Jesus sees the heart of the giver, which is more important than the size of the gift.

3. The story of a little boy's lunch - a bit of bread, some fish. A tuna sandwich, that was all. How could that possibly be enough? But it fed a mighty multitude. Take ... Bless ... Break ... Give ...

I gave my lunch to Jesus
And let Him do the rest,
He took the humble bread I had,
Gave thanks and broke and blessed.
It fed a mighty multitude,
My lunch that was so small,
In Jesus' hands it was enough to satisfy them all.

(I gave my life to Jesus
And let him take control,
He took the emptiness I had
And filled and made me whole.
It reached a mighty multitude,
My life that shone so dim,
In Jesus' hands it was a light that drew men unto Him.

I gave my love to Jesus,
He warmed it with His glow
He took the falt'ring love I had
And made it overflow.
That love became a radiance,
That warmed the hearts of men
In Jesus' hands it was enough to bring them hope again.) BS

I ask the question, what would your lunch, your life, your love do, how far would it reach if you gave it into Jesus' hands and let him bless and break and give it out to others?

Putting these three stories together - the spies, the widow's offering, the little boy's lunch - make me want to exclaim, 'Oh to see as Jesus sees', 'Oh to see ourselves and the offering of our lives as Jesus sees us', 'Oh to see others and the world as Jesus sees them.'

God so loved the world that he gave, arms opened wide, drawing in to himself every person of every race and nation, every colour and class, every language and creed. No one is to be excluded, left out. Everyone is welcome.

So it seems that my battle with enough is actually irrelevant in God's eyes. There's nothing - no matter how small or insignificant that God overlooks.

Bible verse says every hair on our head is counted.

God sees every two-a-penny sparrow that hops and chirps and falls to the ground.

Every child is known long before it is born, its name engraved on the palm of God's hand. Remember that moment in Scripture when Jesus welcomed the children. The disciples wanted to shoo them away - Don't bother the Master, you're not important and he's busy, he's tired. But no, Jesus said, Let them come and he gathered them around and he blessed them.

Everyday, ordinary, common things like hair, birds, children are all seen and loved by God. Nothing is overlooked, nothing and no one - not even you or me - is without value in God's sight. And God sees the offering, the motivation of our hearts.

We may think that what we have to give is small, not as big as someone else's offering or talent, not much at all, but Jesus sees right through to the heart with which we give. As one of our Salvation Army songs says, If your heart's alright, you'll do, you'll do. But, we could add, if your heart's not alright ... then no matter what you do, it won't do.

We live with the seeming contradiction that in Jesus' hands what is little becomes big, what is inadequate becomes enough, what is weak becomes strong.

I've thought about this as well in relation to our praying. What difference can my praying make for my grandchildren or my neighbours or for someone who is sick or for all the homeless, stateless refugees and all the needy situations of the world? The need is so great and my prayer is so small, so insignificant.

Then I heard a poem by quirky author and illustrator Michael Leunig. It goes like this:

What's the use of one little hand
What's the use of one little eye
What's the use of one little mouth
When all the world is broken?

Make a cake with one little hand
Shed a tear with one little eye
Speak a word with one little mouth
When all the world is broken.

And I added a couple of verses:
What's the use of one little prayer
When all the world is weeping
Let my prayer say God is near
He faithful watch is keeping

Don't deny your one little prayer
For God himself is listening
He bends his ear to hear your prayer
His love forever glistening

In mid 1970s straight after our commissioning as SA officers my husband and I headed to our first appointment at Chikankata Secondary School in Zambia. At the time my sister was working in a SA hospital in Nagercoil, at the southern tip of India. Drop of water. We cannot deny them that one drop.

When I think of my prayers for others they feel at times like just a drop of water. Can I trust God to make those drops into a river, an 'artesian spring' of living water that will nourish the ground on which it falls and make things blossom and flourish in someone else's life? Would that be an answer to my battle with enoughness? Someone wrote, **Every act of love, every mute uplifting of the heart draws the whole world nearer to God.**

A woman who had been through a tough situation wrote: These days I try not to say, "Well, all I can do is pray," because it seems to me that praying is the best and most powerful action I can take. It can be deeply frustrating, when answers do not seem to come, or they are slow, or things take a strange turn we did not see coming, but two things remain sure for me: God is good, and prayer is never, ever, a waste of time.

Can we trust that God means what he says 'This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us - whatever we ask - we know that we have what we asked of him.' (1 John 5:14,15). We need to remember this promise from Scripture when the desperate need seems so great and our prayers seem inadequate or when the answer we want comes slowly or quite differently from how we expected it to come.

God is near. God hears. He will answer, in his own time, in his own way.

So where is your enoughness to be found today? Let it come from the abundant, poured out, overflowing abundance of God, over you and through you to your part of the world, the neighbourhood, the community, the street, the family where you live and have your being. Stand under the waterfall flow of that great abundance today.

I want to ask the question, What do you need from Jesus today?

I invite you to hold out your hands and cup them in the form of a bowl.

Are you willing to believe in his provision for you today?

Are you willing to let Jesus fill the bowl of your life today with Enough?

Enough of himself. Enough Hope, Love, Peace, Compassion, Healing, Joy, Energy, Forgiveness, Mercy, Resolve, ... whatever it is you need enough of.

Let me remind you that God's final word on 'enough' is

My grace is enough. My strength comes into its own in your weakness. The question is - Can we trust that God is enough in each of us to make us enough?

In a moment we are going to sing. If you would like someone to pray for you to have more of Jesus, then come forward as we sing. But first let us pray.

Prayer

Our gracious God we ask today for more of Jesus, more of his grace, more of his goodness, more of his glory to be shown in and through our lives. We want to trust that more of you will make us more than enough for all that you call us to.

So we bring our weakness, our little strength, our inadequacy that at times we feel so keenly. We pray that you will gather up the offering of our lives, as you did that little boy's lunch and that you will make it enough, more than enough, to bless and minister to those around us.

SMALL PARCELS

We carry ourselves in small parcels,
forgetting grace likes to burst at the seams.

We carry ourselves as apologetic examples of humanity,
forgetting all vessels here are made from clay.

We carry ourselves as small voices amongst a strident world
forgetting how sound carries from another sphere.

We carry ourselves as dim candles,
forgetting faint lights shine brightly in the dark.

We carry ourselves as so much less than we are.

Let's raise our heads and breathe.

Smile at ourselves until our hearts swell.

By Ana Lisa de Jong —

