

The ethic of scarcity is what makes our economic world go round.

We've decided that goods have value based on supply and demand, the more something is wanted and the less of it there is, the more it is worth.

If there's not much of something, but nobody wants it, it doesn't have a very high financial value.

Or, if there is a lot of something, and not many people want it, or there's more than enough for all the people who want it, it doesn't have a very high value.

You have to hit the sweet spot of something being highly desired and in limited supply, then its value goes up, in effect, because people want it and are willing to compete for it.

I understand this from an economic perspective, but from an ethical perspective, it's very troubling, especially when this logic invades other areas of our lives.

We get in the habit of thinking that we can never have everything we want, and there's never going to be enough for everyone to have what they want, especially if lots of us want the same things.

It makes all of our interactions and transactions competitive.

What I have is intrinsically better precisely because you can't have it.

If this is the foundation upon which our social relationships are built, it's disastrous.

It doesn't foster generosity or collaboration or empathy or mutual success.

We can't all succeed because there isn't enough success to go around, so by definition, some of us have to lose or give up what we want, in order for others to prosper.

There's a famous statue of Jesus in Oklahoma City in which Jesus is resting his head in his hands, seeming exasperated.

It's entitled "and Jesus wept," and it's a memorial erected in memory of the victims of the Oklahoma City Bombing in 1995.

But for me, it's a beautifully real and human depiction of Jesus, he doesn't look divine or other-worldly, he looks like a human, grieving as we all do when we feel sad or defeated or despondent.

When I imagine what Jesus' response would be to the fact that our economic system and our means of survival is all based on competition, I imagine this image.

A frustrated and tired Jesus, head in hands, asking himself, "When will they learn?"

I imagine Jesus would be so frustrated because this system of supply/demand is counterintuitive to the Gospel message, which is founded on abundance.

Abundance, the concept that there's enough to go around, enough for all, we can each have what we need to survive and thrive and so can everyone else.

This is different from greed or excess.

But if we all are reasonable about our desires, then the ethic of abundance teaches us that there is enough for all of us have what we need in order to be happy.

We see this message in so many stories in the Gospels.

In the loaves and the fishes, there's enough food to go around.

In the healing stories, Jesus always has enough time/energy to heal one more person.

In story of the Last Supper, there's enough room for all at the table.

There's enough of Jesus's life and legacy and love to go around when we eat and drink together and remember him.

And we don't even have to be worthy of this abundance.

We learn this lesson in the story of the prodigal son, when he goes away and squanders all the wealth that his father gave him, then he returns home, poor and desolate, and his father throws him a party and kills the fatted calf because he has come home!

And finally, we hear the ultimate story of abundance in the scripture we heard this morning, the famous parable of the Wedding in Cana.

In this story, Jesus is at a multi-day wedding celebration with his friends and his mother.

His mother, Mary, (although she goes unnamed in the story), notices that all the wine has run out.

Now, if you come from a family or social circle that likes to indulge, then you know what a travesty it is when the alcohol runs out.

You might as well turn the house lights on and tell everyone to go home.

The party is over.

Once Mary sees that the wine has run out, she goes to her son, Jesus, and matter-of-factly says, "They have no wine."

It's curious that Mary brings her concern to Jesus, or that she thinks it's his responsibility to address this crisis.

I'd think that the serving staff or parents of the married couple or wedding party or wedding planner might be charged with solving this problem.

But Mary must know something about her son that nobody else knows yet, and given his response to her, he himself might not even know what he's capable of.

Once Mary tells Jesus the wine is gone, his response is nasty.

He basically tells her, "Woman, how is that our problem? My hour has not yet come." (John 2:5).

Mary, being all the wiser, ignores her son's nasty reply and tells the servants, "Do whatever he [Jesus] tells you." (John 2:5)

At this point it's pretty clear that Mary knows more than she lets on about who Jesus is and what he's capable of.

And, given the powerful influence mothers can have, I'd venture to guess that she convinced him to solve the problem, but that's not in the story.

All we know is that after Jesus' exchange with his mother, Jesus tells the servants to fill 6 stone jars, each of them holding 20-30 gallons of water.

As I shared with the children earlier, that's at least 120 gallons of water.

So, the jugs are filled, and Jesus tells the stewards to take some of the "water" to the chief steward, who tastes it, and instantly realizes that this is not water.

This is REALLY good wine, not the cheap stuff out of the box from the corner store.

This is the good stuff.

He doesn't know where the wine came from, all he knows is that his minion stewards brought it to him, so he assumes the bridal party saved the good wine until last, which is unusual.

Usually you serve the good wine first, when everyone can actually taste and enjoy it.

And then as the partying continues, you serve progressively cheaper wine because by day three, most people would be so drunk that they'd have no clue what they were drinking, wine, water or otherwise.

Now once we get past the irresponsible and hedonistic nature of the story, there's a beautiful message about grace buried within it.

This abundance reveals God's grace to us.

There's enough of the good stuff to go around, God's grace, forgiveness and love.

And this applies not only to God's love and care and concern for each of us, but it applies to our tangible resources as well.

There's enough food, shelter and clothing to go around.

And for those of us who feel like we have enough material goods but we are lacking in time, especially leisure time, there's enough of that to go around too.

Now, those of you who are cynical might be saying to yourselves, of course we think there's enough to go around most of us have plenty, and it's easy for us to make that claim.

But what about those who are struggling with providing basic necessities for themselves and their families, both locally and around the world, they'd call us out for making such a claim.

But if we take a closer look at the text, it shows us that even those without, even those on the bottom of the economic ladder, there's enough of the good stuff for them too.

In this story, there's an important detail that we overlook.

Who are the first people who get a taste of the new, delicious wine?

It's not Jesus or his disciples or his mother or the wedding guests or the bride or the groom, it was a steward, a servant.

It was one of those people at the wedding who walks around in a tux and white gloves and serves you hors d'oeuvres and then refills your drinking glass when you're seated at dinner.

Why did Jesus have the chief steward taste it?

Maybe because he needed someone with a clear mind and palette to taste it to make sure the wine was good, because maybe he himself had been partying and wasn't of clear mind.

We don't know exactly why, but we do know that the blessing was bestowed upon the head steward.

But there's another group of folks in this story who fall even lower on the totem pole than the head server, and they have their moment of privilege as well.

The regular, lowly servants, they are the ones who witness Jesus turn the water into the wine, they get to witness the miracle.

This is something the head steward doesn't get the privilege of experiencing.

In fact, at the end of the story, the head server told the bridegroom that they saved the best wine for last, so he presumably thought the good wine was hiding in the store room somewhere and they just now, 3 days into the party, decided to serve it.

So, you see, this story teaches us that there's enough to go around for all of us at every place on the socio-economic spectrum.

And, if we remember that there's enough of God's love and grace to go around, hopefully that faith will compel us to believe that there are enough material goods to go around, and to behave accordingly.

In fact, I think sometimes those in need have a greater understanding of the abundance and generosity around us, because they have been in a position in which they depended upon it.

One of the most incredible qualities of our town, and I am sure this applies to other towns in the area as well, is the extravagant generosity that I see displayed all the time.

I was in True North last week, and I met someone who lives in Burlington and we got to talking about how wonderful it is to live here, and she shared with me that she was diagnosed with cancer right after she moved here.

This was just a few years ago, and she didn't know anyone in the community.

She made one phone call, to someone she knew professionally, and within a few hours, they had set up a month-long schedule for people to bring her meals 3x a day while she was recovering.

These were strangers in the community who stepped up to help her.

And as a member of the Board of People Helping People, I could speak all afternoon about the extravagant generosity that people bestow upon our organization, which allows us to serve the most vulnerable people of our community.

And this extravagance is present right here in our church as well.

Last year, when we took a special collection for Syrian Refugees, we collected nearly \$1,000.00 on one Sunday morning.

And a few weeks ago, our financial secretary, John Heald, came into my office and told me about a very generous financial donation was anonymously made to our church at the end of last year.

Now, I recognize that some of this might have to do with the fact that the economy in this area is doing much better than in other areas of the country.

But I also think the commitment to being generous and to caring for one another runs deeper than that.

Our church and our town are a living example of turning those 120 gallons of water into fine wine, and sharing it with everyone.

God's realm on earth is not about competition.

It's not about me getting mine at the expense of you getting yours.

Or, as Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King wrote in his book Letters from a Birmingham Jail,

"In a real sense all life is inter-related.

All men are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny.

Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.

I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be, and you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be...

This is the inter-related structure of reality."

These are God's economics, that there's enough to go around, when each one of us thrives, we all thrive.

Amen.