

It is so good to be at Christ Church this morning. Last Sunday I was at another Christ Church, Christ Church Cathedral in Canterbury, a slightly less intimate space, but not all that different in spirit.

I was away with Selinde for a month's holiday in which we walked two pilgrimages: the Portuguese Camino. from Porto in Portugal to Santiago, Spain. The second pilgrimage was the way of St Augustine from Canterbury to Minster Abbey near Ramsgate.

So much happened to us that we haven't sorted it all out as of yet. But one of the themes that followed us throughout our days of walking was our awareness of the abundance of life on this planet. As we walked, we passed through vineyards, wheat fields, patches of corn and olive groves. We were constantly struck by the beauty and the scale of the natural world, the world of growing things.

Nature is ridiculous in its extravagance. It is not possible to overstate the abundance of the natural world. Plants are relentless in their efforts to create more little plants. Many of you are avid gardeners and know exactly what I mean. You spend a little time coaxing things to grow, but once they begin growing, that is when the real work starts--pruning, cutting pulling, chopping, controlling the frantic growth of your plants, so they don't take over your garden, your yard, the island!

Whatever you believe about the creation or the evolution of the world it is hard not to be amazed at the diversity, the richness and the generosity of the natural world. And it is hard not to wonder how it can be that in such a world there are still people, (millions of people), who don't have enough to eat. The blame for poverty and want in the world cannot be placed on nature. Nature provides not just enough, but an astounding overabundance of what we need to live, poverty is the result of the greed of some, and our failure to manage what God's world freely gives us.

The abundance and fecundity of nature is a matter of mathematics. If I had a grape I would hold it up, and we would all agree that in that little sphere are a few seeds that have the potential to create hundreds if not thousands of other grapes. The world God has created has the potential to reproduce itself indefinitely and infinitely. The word *abundance* doesn't seem to suffice.

In the Gospel reading from today, we see abundance played out in the well-known story of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes. This is not natural extravagance, but supernatural extravagance. When everyone has shared the 5 loaves and two fishes, blessed and prayed over by Jesus, and gathered up the remnants, there are 12 baskets of left overs. Whatever you believe about this story, the point

that it is making is clear, God is an extravagant God, and the Gospel calls us to trust in that extravagance.

So why do we not always feel that way? Why do we continue to worry that there is not enough? Not enough money, not enough hours in the day, or years in a lifetime; not enough friends or enough people in church. We are often like the Apostles whose response to perceived scarcity is to send people home, cut back, cancel programs, cling to what we have, restrict what we give away. Our tendency is to do the opposite of what the Gospel is calling us to do; to hold on to what we have in the face of what we consider to be problems of not enough. Why do we respond in this way?

Usually, of course, it has to do with fear; fear that *we* are going to go without.

It is not easy to live the life of faith that Jesus calls us to. It sometimes seems impossible.

So, what can we do, how can we make *some* headway and at least move in the right direction.

Stephen Covey, who you will be familiar with, says this:

“MOST PEOPLE ARE DEEPLY SCRIPTED IN THE SCARCITY MENTALITY. THEY SEE LIFE AS HAVING ONLY SO MUCH, AS THOUGH THERE WERE ONLY ONE PIECE OUT THERE. AND IF SOMEONE WERE TO GET A BIG PIECE OF THE PIE, IT WOULD MEAN LESS FOR EVERYBODY ELSE.

“THE ABUNDANCE MENTALITY, IS THE PARADIGM THAT THERE IS PLENTY OUT THERE AND ENOUGH FOR EVERYBODY. IT RESULTS IN SHARING OF PRESTIGE, OF RECOGNITION, OF PROFITS. IT OPENS POSSIBILITIES, OPTIONS, ALTERNATIVES, AND CREATIVITY.”

TO ME, HE SAYS, THE BIGGEST DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE SCARCITY MENTALITY AND THE ABUNDANCE MENTALITY IS THAT **THE SCARCITY MENTALITY CARES WHAT OTHER PEOPLE HAVE, WHILE THE ABUNDANCE MENTALITY DOESN'T.**

Covey is suggesting that one of the reasons we become mired in the belief that there is not enough is that we focus outside of ourselves, we compare ourselves to others and develop expectations based on what we see others doing or having.

This is natural enough for we who live in a consumer culture, which is, after all, founded on the principle that if our attention can be focussed on what other people have, we can be convinced to buy that very same stuff, whether or not we need it or want it.

The strategy of the advertising media depends on our tendency toward envy and comparison. But we know where that leads us, and where it leads the culture.

So what is the antidote? We know that as well, the antidote is gratitude, to see and experience everything in our lives as a gift. It is impossible to be grateful and envious at the same time. It is impossible to thank God for the abundance of beauty and grace in our lives and worry that there is not enough at the same time; we cannot hold both of those experiences at once.

But our human tendency is to bounce from one to the other, from gratitude to worry and back again, spending more or less time on each depending on our personality and life experience.

So what can we do? How can we begin to fix this?

All the spiritual masters tell us the same thing. Practice, they say. We can practice catching ourselves when we begin to worry and move into interior expressions of gratitude. We can practice saying "thank God" for every moment of every day. We can practice looking out

for those moments when the darkness of doubt comes over us, and practice transforming these moments by appreciating something small and simple. Even appreciating our ability to doubt can charge the experience of doubt with grace.

There is sometimes less than we expect in life, but there is never not enough. Every moment is sufficient in itself. Every moment contains everything we need in that moment. If it were not so we would not be sitting here together this morning. Grace has carried us this far and grace will lead us on.

We are called to lives of radical gratitude, and it is this gratitude that will change us and everything around us. It is radical gratitude that will lead us into trust in the abundance to which God is calling us.