

Matthew 20:1-16

The poet William Blake wrote: “You never know what is enough unless you know what is more than enough.” It’s a pat little aphorism, but I wonder if you would inhabit it with me for a bit. Is there a time when you discovered, beyond a doubt, what was more than enough?

For me, it was about ice cream. As a kid I was allowed to bicycle with my friends to the next town over, because it had a Dairy Queen. As a rule, we each got a single dip cone, or for the really adventurous, a dilly bar. But I locked eyes with something else on the menu, something sumptuous and expensive. For weeks I saved my allowance. I don’t know what possessed me to go alone, whether it was sheer greed or maybe just that none of my pals was free that day, but I got on my bike, pedaled like a crazy person, arrived at Dairy Queen and ordered a hot fudge brownie sundae.

It was every bit as delicious as I had hoped and dreamed. It was also gargantuan, at least to a 10-year-old. I ate, and ate, and ate, until the hot fudge began to cloy, and the ice cream was mostly melted, and even the brownie seemed sad and dusty in my mouth. It was crushing. I had worked so hard and waited so long, and now I was licked. It was too much. It was more than enough. I had to throw the rest in the trash.

I have been pondering this idea of enoughness. Whether we’re talking about ice cream and paperclips, or houses and boats, the exact amount of something that fills, not only our bellies but also our hearts, is a very individual matter. I wouldn’t dare tell 10-year-old me that she probably didn’t need a whole sundae. And yet what constitutes *enough* is influenced, in ways subtle and not so subtle, by what we see around us. What are our friends doing? What meaning do we attach to that thing we are craving? What do we actually need for the day, as opposed to what we want?

As we observe this Season of Creation in Christ, it is abundantly clear that overconsumption is killing our planet. We have clogged landfills in Ghana with Thrivent t-shirts, created a new oceanic continent with plastic bags, and raised the global temperature beyond what many scientists think is the tipping point. Meanwhile, The average American storage unit costs \$89/month to house things we’ve forgotten we own. We all know there’s a problem, but we don’t know how to stop. Because no matter how well-

intentioned and well-executed, individual actions alone are not going to save our earth.

But I'm not telling you anything you don't already know.

So what then? Do we close our eyes and wait for the Rapture?¹

I think we start by figuring out what is enough. Despite my early collision with a brownie sundae, I'm no expert on enoughness. But Swedes talk about "lagom," not too little but not too much. In other words, not minimalism, which can give the impression of asceticism and deprivation, but the *right* amount, most of the time.²

American business culture has given us the term "satisficed" (satisfy x suffice) to overcome the tyranny of too much choice and our drive to maximize every decision. To be satisficed is to rate something good enough and move on to more important things. And finally, South Asians have a word, "jugaad," which refers to "using scarce resources in a clever and unconventional way." Looking around with jugaad glasses, so to speak, means being able to see abundance in what has been discarded or overlooked. And the belief that everyone can have enough.

When the Israelites were on their 40-year pilgrimage through the wilderness, God provided manna. "When they measured it with an omer [about three and a half quarts], those who gathered much had nothing over, and those who gathered little had no shortage; they gathered as much as each of them needed" (Ex. 16.18). Those who tried to hoard the food found it infested with insects, but on the day before the Sabbath, the people gathered twice as much to tide them over the day of rest, and it did not become infested. Everyone is fed. I'm not going to try to explain away the miracle of manna, but I think, through this story, God's people come to value *that which is enough*.

The French philosopher Blaise Pascal was the first to observe you are born with a God-shaped hole in our heart, a yearning for something outside yourself, that transcends yourself. Lots of us try to fill this void with created things—ice cream, alcohol, shopping—but desire for those things

¹ Which, by the way, is a completely made-up invention of the 19th century

² <https://haukr.com/what-is-lagom/> (see this webpage containing great food for thought)

can trick you into believing there will never be enough, even in a world of such teeming diversity and plenty. For Pascal, nothing other than Godself will do to fill the hole. Because God has made us in God's image in order for us be in relationship to God, and Jesus Christ has set about trying to show what that relationship is like, reconciling us to God where we have been separated.

In the gospel reading today, Jesus continues to teach about enoughness in his parable about grace. You see, the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a vineyard. She goes out and hires a batch of gung-ho laborers at the going rate, but they're new to grape-picking and work a little slower than she'd like. She says to herself, "Well, they'll gain speed as they gain experience. But I guess I'd better go hire some additional laborers." So she goes back to the market at 9 and hires a couple of harried parents who showed up late because they had to get their children to daycare.

They too set to work, but immediately a cell phone rings because one of the kids has gotten sick at school. Without a word of complaint, the landlord heads back to hire more workers. These new guys are real jokesters, pausing to tell some tall tale at every other grapevine, but they keep the other workers laughing and jolly, and the work shift flies by. "It's good for morale," thinks the landowner, and goes back to the marketplace just as rush hour is beginning. There stand a couple of woebegone teenagers she hasn't noticed before, looking like the ones who are last to be picked for any sport in gym class. "Why aren't you working?" she asks them. "Because no one has hired us." "You also go into the vineyard."

When it comes time to pass out the checks, they find they've been paid, not one, but two denarii. Everyone is ecstatic—two days' wages!—until the first workers realize that the last have been paid the same. "What's with this nonsense?" they ask the owner. She answers with a smile: "Only I know how many lugs of grapes you each picked. And you might be surprised at the totals. But I paid you more than you bargained for, and you were happy to receive it. Why do you need more money than you can spend?"

As usual, Jesus' parables stir the pot. They poke at our ideas of fairness, and our belief that God's realm should be a meritocracy. But what could I possibly do to "merit" my life, this world, and all its marvels? Just as the rain falls alike on the just and the unjust, God's blessings are not given to

the one who works hardest, but at the free and generous will of the giver. The blessings aren't wages for labor but rather an abundant gift. Out of that abundance there is more than enough for everyone. And once you know what is more than enough, you will know what is enough. Let us bless the Lord; thanks be to God. Amen.