

Sunday January 19, 2025
Second Sunday after Epiphany

Meditation: “Extravagance”

Back in the day, a wedding, like the one Jesus and his mother, Mary, were at was attended by everyone in the community, plus other invited guests, like cousins, aunts, and uncles. The wedding was not just a one day event, either. Oh no, it would last an entire week. Imagine, an entire week of celebrating and feasting! Families today complain about the cost of a single meal, can you imagine what a significant strain on the budget of the groom’s family an entire week of feasting and drinking would create? For this reason, wedding feasts would often be supported by the greater community. If you were of position or well thought of in the community, no problem. But what if you were of lower status, or had few contacts who could or would contribute to the larder? Of course, the best of the food and wine would be served at the beginning of the week and would slowly taper off to the lesser wine and the cold shoulder joint of meat by the end of the week. But to run out of food or wine altogether was a disaster. It would bring shame on the family. Without the alcohol content of a less-than-desirable wine to kill bacteria, even water was not a reliable option to serve to your guests. You can see the problem at that wedding in Cana, can’t you? A dearth of wine was an unmitigated disaster and was shameful for the host family. This is the point at which cousin Mary intervenes.

Today we hear about all manner of shortages, or scarcity. There is a scarcity of affordable housing, especially for those who are experiencing homelessness, those with addiction issues, those with mental health issues. Right now there are about 2,000 homeless people in the city of London. The numbers for 2024 aren’t out yet, but in 2023 the food banks in London fed over 175,000 people, which works out to about 15,000 people a month, and we are all well aware that the numbers in 2024 were significantly higher than in 2023. If we look globally, there are 30 countries currently experiencing extreme hunger. The top three are Somalia, Yemen, and Madagascar. Haiti

is number five, and, remember this, India is number twenty-three. All told, over 800 million people live in hunger. It would appear that there is a shortage of food, both locally and on a global scale.

Did you know that, in North America alone, we throw out about 168 million tonnes of food a year? That is enough food to feed almost one quarter of those living in hunger around the world. And that is just the food waste from North America. So, the question is, is there really a shortage or scarcity of food, or is it a matter of inequitable distribution? Something to think about in a few minutes when we go downstairs and there will be food aplenty, and then some. Something else to think about is, is it enough to engage in acts of charity – making donations to the food bank? What about pushing for economic justice so people don't need to rely on the food bank in the first place?

How about affordable housing, especially for those who are homeless. Indwell has cleaned out the old War Memorial Children's Hospital and is about ready to start plumbing, electrical, framing and drywall work. New windows are on order and in the spring, the exterior of the building will get some attention to fix the brick and mortar. All told, they estimate the cost of renovating the building at 17 million dollars, and that will yield 42 housing units. They are also almost ready to apply for a building permit to restore the Health Services Building. That building will yield another 96 housing units and cost about 38 million dollars. That's a grand total of 138 housing units at a cost of 55 million dollars. That hardly makes a dent in the 2000 homeless number, less than 10 percent, at a cost of just under 400,000 dollars per unit. At that rate, it would cost 800 million dollars to supply housing for all of the homeless currently in London.

I remember hearing on the radio on January second, that the top income earners in Canada had earned, by lunchtime, the total annual income of the average worker. Consider that there are about 60 billionaires in Canada, and

over 1,000 of them in North America – people like Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos, Bill Gates, Mark Zuckerberg, and Warren Buffet, and in Canada, the Thomson family, Irving family and Weston family – all of them worth multiple billions of dollars. China has over 400 billionaires, and India, remember they are 23rd on the list of countries with the worst hunger, has over 200 billionaires.

So, is the problem with the cost of living one of shortage and scarcity, or is it with the inequitable distribution of wealth?

It has been said that democracy has failed. I want to think about that a little more. But what I am willing to say is that the free-market economy has failed. It has failed countless people around the world. It has failed the homeless. It has failed the hungry. It has failed all those struggling to make ends meet – those who have month left over at the end of the money. That is why we need food banks and have homeless encampments. That is what is behind much of the violence, terrorism and war around the world. The problem is greed, or, put another way, the love of money. Yet, if we are honest, there is plenty for all of the earth's people, if it were fairly distributed. If everyone had enough, we likely wouldn't see acts of terrorism. If everyone were content with enough, there likely wouldn't be war. But for those things to happen, we need justice and righteousness to flow down like mighty waters.

Let's see, six water jars containing twenty or thirty gallons. Average that out at twenty-five gallons, multiply by six and that's one hundred fifty gallons. Now, to convert that into litres I'll assume that this is Imperial gallons and not US gallons as this comes from the King James Bible, so that would be 150 times 4.5 which equals 675. The standard bottle of wine is 750 ml, so if I divide 675 by .75 that would give me – 900 bottles of wine in Cana, 900 bottles of wine, if one of those bottles should be consumed that would leave 899 bottles of wine in Cana. Jesus turned scarcity into abundance and abundance of the highest quality. It was more than just abundance, it was extravagance. God has provided plenty for all, and then some – my definition of extravagance – if only we can be just with it all.

