

Prayer: Naming God, thank you for choosing to call us child of God and have never called us consumers. Help us live into the identity you give us so that we can care and share for all of your creation. Help us to trust in you for all our daily needs. Where there is scarcity, assure us of the abundance you can give. Amen.

Exodus 16:4 Then the Lord said to Moses, "I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. In that way I will test them, whether they will follow my instruction or not.

Lisa Sharon Harper, author of *The Very Good Gospel*, in her chapter Shalom and Creation, writes the following: "One of the greatest lies of our culture is I buy, therefore, I am. Politicians call citizens consumers." As she narrates her audiobook, Harper retorts emphatically, "We are not consumers! Consumption is not part of our identity and worth. This drives us to consume more than any other nation on earth"

In the very first chapter of the Bible, what is the identity that God gives to us? That's right, they were told that we are created in the image of God. We are told to have dominion, which we usually misunderstand to mean dominate instead of what is intended to lovingly care for, manage and share the great abundance that God provides.

I buy, therefore I am. What a contrast to God's care and directions for the Hebrew people in the desert after they were liberated from slavery in Egypt. In the desert, God gave them daily manna. They were directed to gather only what they needed for the day. If they gathered more and tried to keep it for the next day, it would rot and grow maggots. God's care for the Hebrew people in the desert provided abundance in a place of scarcity. As you know, it's quite human of us to focus on the scarcity around us rather than God's amazing abundance. I invite you for a moment to reflect on your own life and your interaction with God's creation as I share a story of a time in my life, when I succeeded in consuming less.

Many years ago, in the midst of the energy crisis of the 1970's, I was a college student in Nebraska. I attended a presentation by a pastor from West Virginia. It was titled "Enough is Enough". In his talk he pointed out the many ways in which we over consume as Americans and especially how at that time we were consuming 1/3 of the world's oil production while being only 6% of the world's population. The presentation got me thinking; thinking about my car which most of the time, it just sat in the college parking lot. I decided I would try storing my car for six months and just use my bicycle, public transit and if I caught a ride with someone in their car, I would be sure to generously pay for all the gas. It worked!! So, I sold my car and for the next seven years, I did not own a car while finishing college, and going through seminary and an internship in Brazil. For me, not owning a car was freedom. I did not have to worry about changing the oil, filling up with gas, renewing the license or finding a place to put it. Public transit, that was an opportunity to read and relax. And if I did catch a ride with someone, I enjoyed the company, and I could be generous as I knew the expense of owning and operating that car.

When I graduated from seminary and I received my first call to a rural parish, 30 miles Southwest of Watertown, South Dakota, I knew I would be in the car again. Bicycle was obviously not practical and there was no public transportation. It was interesting how I felt I was losing the freedom I had enjoyed for seven years of not having the burden of owning and paying for a car. Now, I know the cars are pretty much the only thing that works in rural Minnesota but my point is that all our stuff has a way of possessing us. Our stuff can become our identity. And our over consumption is obviously not good for the planet, or for our grandchildren and their children.

Author Lisa Sharon Harper suggest four individual practices that are good for the planet.

- Practice generosity.
- Practice simple living by forsaking over consumption in favor of making sure all have enough.
- Practice dependence on God, for all our needs.
- And practice reciprocity. An example of reciprocity is the relationship between animals and plants. Animals need oxygen that plants produce and plants need carbon dioxide which animals produce. So reciprocity means finding ways to give back to the earth, receiving and restoring.

What is our identity? Consumer, or someone created in the image of God who's given the responsibility of managing and lovingly caring for the amazing abundance that God places in our lives?

Let us pray: Lord, help us to recognize one of the lies of our culture, "I buy, therefore I am." And open our eyes to your abundance that we might be created by you more and more into your image of loving, self-sacrificing caretaker. In your name, we pray, Amen.