Opening: A Word for Today

The Portuguese have a word that I think is appropriate for today. I'm going to butcher it, because I don't speak Portuguese, but the word is *saudade*: the melancholic feeling of incompleteness that comes from an absence that may never return.

I wonder if that feeling of incompleteness might actually be one of the more powerful driving forces in our lives. That feeling that we never quite have everything we need, that there is something in our lives that is not complete.

Maybe it's that relationship that isn't quite perfect. Maybe it's that health problem that, no matter how many times you tell the doctor about it, never quite gets fixed. Maybe it's the house that is never clean enough for guests to come over. Maybe it's that career that's not quite successful enough. Maybe it's the loved one who will never come home again, or who, if they do come home again, is never the same.

That melancholic feeling of incompleteness often drives us to work harder, to be more invested in things, to push ourselves further, to try more. And that can be a really good thing, because sometimes in our lives we just need that extra drive.

But I also wonder if sometimes the incompleteness is not a thing that can be filled. I wonder if sometimes it's just an emptiness that grows over time, a feeling of never being able to get enough.

The Word "Enough"

That's the word I really want to focus us on this morning: *enough*.

There are a lot of bad ways we use that word. Not good enough. Not smart enough. Not enough time. Not present enough to others. Don't have enough things. We put the word *not* in front of *enough* so often that it becomes something we are familiar with. We are far more familiar with *not enough* than we are with *having enough*.

What Do You Ache For?

Earlier this year I read Kate Bowler's new book, *Joyful Anyway*, and in it she talks about what she calls "the ache." She says, "We all have it. We all have the ache, that yearning for something more, something that will feel like enough."

So what she did was post online asking people what they ached for. I don't know if I'm brave enough to post that online, but she did. And here are some of the aches she heard:

- One more moment with my son.
- Some peace of mind about money.

- Somewhere to call home.
- For my soulmate to live forever. (And yes, my soulmate is my dog.)
- Being pain-free for a day.
- A real friend who returns your texts right away and doesn't make you feel weird when you ask for something.
- A cure for regret.
- Allergy relief.
- A job that makes my family respect me.
- Potato chips.

I wonder: if you were leaving church this morning and someone cornered you at one of the doors and asked, "What do you ache for?", what might you tell them? What is your ache?

Scarcity, Abundance, and the Middle Place

I feel like the ache comes about because we tend to fall on one side of a spectrum. We either fall on the scarcity side, the side that says there is not enough for us, or we fall on the abundance side, and we don't realize there is something in the middle called *enough*.

Manna in the Wilderness

The Exodus story that was shared a moment ago offers us an insight into what it means to have enough, in the story of manna in the wilderness.

If you are familiar with the workings of God, especially from the New Testament, we often hear about God providing in abundance. Abundant wine at a wedding. Abundant bread and fish for the people who had come out to listen to Jesus. Abundant grace throughout the letters of the New Testament. We hear about a God of abundance throughout the New Testament, and we hear about it in the Hebrew scriptures as well. In the Exodus, God is leading the Israelites to a place of abundance, a promised land.

So it is a little jarring that, in the middle of the Exodus, as the people cry out to have their basic human needs sustained in the wilderness, God does not provide abundance. God provides *enough*. And there is something deeply satisfying about that.

I think God is teaching the escaped slaves from Egypt what it means to be okay with having enough. I wonder if *enough* might actually resonate with us more strongly than abundance does.

I know I've fallen into the trap before of talking about the abundance of God, because we live in a world with so much scarcity. It's nice to imagine a God who is not bound by scarcity. It is nice to think of a God who always provides not only what we need but so much that we could not possibly count it all. We love the God of abundance. I love the God of abundance.

But what if there are times when we don't need abundance? What if there are times in our lives when enough is good enough?

Enough Teaches Us to Allocate

Let me tell you what it looks like to strive for enough rather than abundance.

Lynne Twist wrote a book called *The Soul of Money*, and I want to share a quote from it. She writes that there is a principle of sufficiency: when we let go of trying to get more of what we don't really need, it frees up immense energy to make a difference with what we have. She describes the goal of being known for what we allocate rather than what we accumulate.

I like that. I like the idea that maybe abundance teaches us to accumulate, but *enough* teaches us to allocate.

Think about this from God's perspective for a moment. As God guides the Israelites through the wilderness, these are people who have spent generations not having enough. They have learned what *not enough* feels like. And before they can experience abundance in the promised land, God teaches them what it feels like to have exactly enough.

Perhaps, like the Israelites, we can learn what our *enough* is. And when we know what our enough is, we learn to be satisfied with what we have rather than with what we think we are falling short of.

The Birds and the Lilies

In our gospel reading, Jesus speaks to the worries and anxieties of his followers. He points to the birds and the lilies and talks about how they don't waste away their lives with worry and anxiety the way humans do.

I think Jesus is inviting us to wonder: what if we didn't have the ache? What if we didn't ache for things? The birds don't seem to ache. The lilies don't seem to have the ache. They don't seem to have that melancholy feeling of incompleteness. What if we borrowed from them? If they don't have it, maybe it means we don't need to have it either.

Freed From the Tug-of-War

Learning *enough* frees us from the tug-of-war between scarcity and abundance, because that tug-of-war is hard. When we live in scarcity, it's hard to imagine anything other than that. And oftentimes, when we have abundance, it's hard to think of anything but that.

Having enough teaches us, maybe, that it's okay to make sure somebody else has enough, too. When we have more of one thing or another, it's okay to share it with somebody else so that they have enough.

I know this is stewardship season, and when we're in stewardship season you automatically start thinking I'm talking about our financial enoughness. But I think this is so much more than that. Some of us are going to have an abundance of time. Maybe not this week; maybe next week. Some of us come to life with an abundance of time, or empathy, or kindness, or some skill or talent.

Or how about this: how about those people who come to us with an abundance of hope? They learn what is enough so that, from that abundance, they may allocate, so that someone who doesn't have enough might.

Maybe that's what *enough* teaches us. When those moments of abundance do come, instead of continuing to try to acquire more and more, we start thinking: how do I allocate what I have received to those who are still waiting for enough?

What a gift that might be. What a gift to learn to live with enough.

Closing Prayer

Let us be in prayer.

Holy, wonderful God, you have given us enough. Like manna in the wilderness, sometimes we try to take more than we need. Sometimes we try to hoard against tomorrow. And yet you teach us again and again and again that we can be okay with enough.

I thank you for enough, God.

Amen.