

**Thomas Jefferson Memorial Church – Unitarian Universalist**  
**“When Is It Enough?”**  
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**December 6, 2009**

The title of this Sermon started out being something entirely different.

So those of you who came this morning anticipating to be hammered for owning too many or too much of something, may be in for a disappointment. And even though this sermon is being delivered by someone raised in the Roman Catholic tradition with a Worship Associate raised in the Jewish tradition there will be no Guilt Trips for you this morning.

The current title reads “When is it enough?” The original title was “Exploring whether the concepts of Enough and Abundance can exist happily under the same roof.”

Some sermons come easily for me. Words roll out onto the page and thoughts flow easily from one concept to another. Such was not the case for me when exploring within my own belief system the concepts of enough and abundance. I found myself conflicted, confused. The readings and hymns selected for this service reflect some of the ambiguity I encountered.

My first thought was to approach this subject primarily as a math problem. Enough and Abundance are a simple matter of counting things. How many cars, how many bowls, how many TVs, computers, CD’s etc...I was going to spend time talking about the book “The Material World.” It is one of those “coffee table” books that contains pictures of “average” families from 30 countries around the globe. The photos show the family outside of their home with all of their possessions laid out on the ground around them. It was going to be a sermon of statistics, numbers, and guilt. “’Tis a Gift to be Simple” - Selecting this song feels like falling into a stereotype, an easy out, something known and familiar. I mean if your topic is the idea of what is enough, what other song would you use? That if we simplify our lives (meaning for me, reduce my commitments, my possessions, and my enjoyment of good wine, great food, elegant dining, etc...), if I simplify then my life would be more fulfilling, more socially correct, more green,, etc. I can see where there is an element of truth in that song. But I personally do not want to give up my experience of abundance in the process and thus my ambivalence and reluctance to fully embrace simplicity as a means to my goal to live both with enough and with abundance.

Then there is the current financial situation we find ourselves in as a nation and a world. Abundance could be explored in the sense of excess. Enough could be discussed from the aspect of changing our basic underlying assumptions contained in our failed economic system. There is fertile ground in plowing the field of overextended capitalism, living on credit, worshiping consumption as the way to happiness. We could discuss the need for us as a nation to find another model to give true meaning and satisfaction to our standard of living. Our Call to Worship...The Way... alludes to this path of consideration “I am Lost. Where is the way? I want to go back. I want to stay here. The Road goes on.” I do believe that we are facing an opportunity to produce a major shift in this country with far reaching implications. But it seems too easy to rail against countries and corporations and systems. And when I catch myself on one of those rants, my subconscious mind produces the bible quote about taking the beam from my own eye before addressing the splinter in some else’s. As is always the case, the major work, maybe the only work, is the work I do on myself, within myself. And so my attention moved elsewhere.

I considered briefly the esoteric approach to the issues of abundance and enough. This path is reflected in the meditation poem... this breath is enough, sitting is enough, this life is enough. This approach to unraveling the issues contained in Abundance and Enough appeals to my monastic tendencies. My practice of meditation is indeed one of the stabilizing forces in my life. My time sitting on my meditation cushion continues to reveal deeper and deeper aspects of myself as I allow the layers of my onion self to fall away. And quiet sitting contributed greatly to the direction of this sermon. But this too falls short of fully satisfying my search to reconciling abundance and enough. A thing I need to be alert to is that given my introspective nature I can use

intellectualization and contemplation as a way of removing myself from the actual experience of life. I can find a certain degree of comfort in a cocoon of isolation and escape.

I moved next to consider the societal aspects of Enough. Here was the need for more equal distribution of goods, the sense of fairness in our dealings and a chance to talk about buying locally, carbon footprints, and the like. And that reading from Gibran on Buying and Selling ended with a perfect segue to reference the bumper sticker that reads “If you want world peace, then work for justice.” And I could cite statistics on the economic and societal inequalities throughout the world and we could explore the need for social justice work.

I could enumerate the facts to support global warming and I could use our upcoming congregational meeting following this service as an opportunity to talk about what we can do to be more green. Justice and environmental responsibility are surely important parts of any discussion about Abundance and Enough. But I did not undertake this topic with the intent of giving a sermon on being green.

So here I was, floundering in a muddle of facts and perceptions and myths - pulled in several directions, all valid, all important and none of them satisfying me completely.

There was a sense that there was something else working inside me that had not fully surfaced yet... To borrow from a former sermon, all of these approaches were signs along the trail but I had not yet glimpsed the mystery I was following.

Then there it was in front of me...a surprise which I had not envisioned on the outset of following the trail of this sermon. There was a growing awareness that Abundance and Enough was not about things. When my point of reference is “stuff” then it becomes problematic for me to reconcile a desire for abundance and the notion of “When is it enough?” This realization dawned as I continually bumped up against my underlying belief that there is a fundamental separation in my concepts of the physical world and the spiritual world. Here I was experiencing what I read in one of Joseph Campbell’s books. That western religions begin with an belief that the

material world is something to be dominated and controlled and was somehow evil, or at the very least non-spiritual. Matter and spirit are separate. Standing in my path was a deep seated belief that all the things I considered spiritual and good were entirely separate from materiality. That my experience of reality is that it is like an egg with a hard brittle shell that must be cracked and discarded to get to the true life giving stuff inside. The shell has value only in that it contains the real stuff, the essence inside.

I was further disturbed by the realization that I made another distinction within the physical world. While there is for me a comforting, spiritual connection with the Natural world - that portion of the material world that is trees and forests and streams and mountains - there is an entirely different attitude when I am faced with the man made material world - the world of factories and cars and TVs and houses and all the stuff around me. These carry with them an underlying sense of “badness.” Maybe not evil, but most certainly not God-stuff.

When I consider the physical world and my concept of “God” as separate my experience of what is Abundance and what is enough are entirely different than when I see all of creation, of experience, as unified. My considerations are entirely different when I can get to the place where my experience of connectedness is much more than that of being an egg sharing a carton with 11 other separate eggs—connected by common experience but separate in reality. How different the perspective when I am not an egg that needs to be cracked and broken but rather I am a living cell within the whole. Who I am, what I do, how I choose, the health and vitality of my existence contributes to the overall health and vitality of all of creation. When I can get to the place where my connectedness to the interdependent web of existence is not an experience of being one in a line of train cars--- joined yet separate, but rather that of being in the ocean of life without the illusion of being a separate drop of water... when I can get to that place - then I can experience both Abundance and Enough.

That meant that I have to somehow reconcile myself to the fact that the Man Made physical world is not separate either but is as much a part and expression of the whole as is the Natural world. I will need to embrace that man made expression of existence, fully aware of its beauty as well as its ugliness, to embrace it fully in the realization that I am an active participant in it, not separate from it, am therefore responsible for it.

Which led me to another realization. There is a “larger evolution”, if you will, going on here. Something possibly beyond my grasp and comprehension. In my belief framework it is the unfolding of the universe and of its consciousness. I recall that some philosophies trace this development in terms of various Ages named for the signs of the Zodiac. The age of Aries, the Piscean age, the Aquarian age. Within this categorization is the idea that each age has a specific emphasis. According to this “calendar” we are currently in a transition between two ages... the ending of the Piscean Age and the “dawning” of the Age of Aquarius. The Piscean Age we are leaving is an age with an emphasis on Love and relationships. Jesus the Christ is considered one of the Avatars of this age with his message of Love one another and what you do to the least you do to me, etc. The Aquarian age is to have an emphasis on Will - which I interrupt as making informed choices, taking action and following through.

I see opportunities for choice, action and follow through all over the place now. The effects and implications of previous choices are becoming more evident. The underlying assumptions, beliefs and motives becoming more visible. I see it in the rise of the Green movement and environmental responsibility, the current challenge of our financial systems, the current events in world like the proliferation of nuclear arms, our ability to rein in the use of terror as a means of furthering causes, etc. We are becoming more and more aware of the implications of our choices. I am becoming more and more aware of opportunities to challenge my basic assumptions, to revisit my choices with more thought, to change behaviors in all aspects of my life - whether it's to eat more healthy food or to drive a less polluting car, or to manage finance more responsibly, or to engage governmental systems in a more direct way to move us toward a society based on more sound values and principles.

Enough for me is becoming less an exercise in counting things and more a practice of remaining consciously aware of my place in the ocean of existence. To examine my assumptions and beliefs as they play out in this journey I call my life. For me Enough has come to mean that what I decide and what I choose has meaning and value in the overall scheme of things. I have discovered that my underlying beliefs directly influence my experiences and my decisions and judgments. That my choices have effects. I can experience both the abundance of life and live without the sense of excess implied by the value of Enough if I make my choices more consciously within that framework of being a cell in the consciousness of existence. Within this awareness I can decide where are my energies and time and talents and treasures being expended-- whether it is indeed a gift to be simple. I can choose to take time to sit and listen to the rhythms of my life so I can more live more mindfully and consider whether this breath this life is enough. I am more aware of the values underlying our economic systems and can more responsibly decide how much credit is enough, whether Christmas is actually about something other than shopping and gift giving. I am more aware of my participation and responsibility beyond myself and I can embrace that I have a responsibility to enable others to experience the fulfillment and contentment.

I have paused on this journey to spend some time with a sense of conscious abiding in the fullness of life. From this vantage point, Abundance is an attitude I can adopt no matter what my experience presents to me. Enough is what I decide it is in the context of responsibly assuming my place in existence.

This can be a busy and a hectic time of year. I invite you to pause with me awhile and contemplate this mystery before us... considering whether living life with that sense of conscious abiding is indeed enough. We'll see.