



LESSONS for LIFE

MARCH 15, 2009 7:00 p.m.
8 LIFE CHANGING MESSAGES FROM JESUS:
FROM WANT TO GRATITUDE
Rev. B. K. Hipsher

As Brent said, we are in the middle of a series called *8 Life Changing Messages from Jesus*. This week we're dealing with the concept from want to gratitude. Now my version of this is, or translation, is moving from a perspective of scarcity to an anticipation of abundance. Now I can understand you might say to me these two things are not parallel. How can abundance and gratitude be equated? Isn't gratitude and attitude an abundance of circumstance? Well certainly gratitude is an attitude and many spiritual traditions and perspectives indicate that abundance is indeed also an attitude. When I was still in my teens I began reading books by the likes of Napoleon Hill, whose entire thesis is based on the phrase *Whatever the mind can conceive and believe it can achieve*, but is living in an attitude of abundance really just all about positive thinking? Well, honestly that might have something to do with it but that's certainly not the whole story; because living in abundance is so powerful that even when we doubt, even when we falter in our positive thinking, abundance still manifests itself around us everywhere.

Let me read to you the reading from this morning: JOHN 6: 5 - 12

When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming towards him he said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?"

He asked this only to test him for he already had in mind what he was going to do. Philip answered him, "*Eight months' wages would not buy enough bread for each one of them to have a bite.*" Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, "*There's a lad here with five barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?*" Jesus said, *Make the people sit down.* There was plenty of grass in that place and the men sat down, about five thousand of them. Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish. When they had all had enough to eat Jesus said to his disciples, *Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted.*

This story perfectly illustrates the difference in attitude between Philip, who probably quite accurately described the cost of feeding the multitude at eight months' wages and Jesus who said, *What do we have? Let's bless it and break it and give it away.* Now some people believe that this was a great miracle, and it may have been; but what if Jesus took the gift of the little boy's loaves and fishes and showed it to others who in turn produced whatever they had with them. After all, it's not really a stretch to think that people who had followed Jesus out into the countryside may have brought food. Some probably had more, some less, but with the attitude of abundance, the attitude of gratitude for what they had took over, there was plenty. There was more than enough. Philip wanted to feed the people; he wanted to offer them hospitality and Andrew found the boy with the loaves and the fishes but Jesus wanted to teach them the lesson, the principle of abundance and gratitude for what they had and I think this is the essence of the story: moving from an attitude of want and scarcity to an attitude of gratitude and expectation of abundance. This could change everything.



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Now what about this second reading for today? One single verse: (Luke 6: 38):

Give, and it shall be given unto you; a good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall be poured into your lap, for with the measure you use it will be measured to you.

This verse is reassuring and encouraging all on its own but it's really important to look at what's going on around this single verse. We're at the end of what is Luke's sermon on the plain. Jesus has been talking and teaching for some time. He's pronounced what we know as the Beatitudes: *Blessed are the poor, the hungry, those who weep, those who are excluded.* In Luke's version of the Beatitudes includes the woes: *Woe to the rich, woe to the well fed, and those who laugh and those who are thought well of...* And then Jesus proceeds to tell us how to achieve what he assures us will come in verse 38. He says, *Love your enemies, return good for evil, lend without expecting repayment, lend without expecting repayment.* Are you kidding? How the heck is that ever going to yield abundance in our lives? Do not judge, do not condemn so that we will not be judged and condemned – and then this: *Give and it will be given to you for the measure you use will be used for you.* Simple, but does it work? Well, let's see what doesn't work: We can look all around us these days to see what doesn't work. Watch the news: greed, self-centred fear, objectifying people and using those who are less fortunate, expecting the poor to pull themselves out of the mire. We know this doesn't work because we're watching the global economy crumble each day on these principles and we're frightened. We're uncertain, we're considering how to keep those assets we still have, we don't know if our jobs will continue – will we ever be able to buy a new car? What's going to happen? What if we just took the simple lessons in today's readings and applied them to our own lives here and now in Toronto, Ontario: share what we have, expect the best of people; love our enemies, do good to people who don't always treat us well; lend without expecting repayment – yes – we know there are always those less fortunate than we are and we are duty bound as Christians to help them to share, to love, to expect greatness of ourselves. This is what defines us as God's people. They will know us by our love.

Here at MCC Toronto we have an opportunity to be a beacon of hope in a sea of despair. We can support those who need help – emotional and spiritual – we can share our time and treasure to sustain the ministries of this church, ministries that support and sustain many people. We have an opportunity to live out the gospel and make good on these promises of Jesus. Jesus stakes everything on us; everything depends on us – but we have to show up. Stop living in want and scarcity and cultivate an attitude of gratitude for what we have and an expectation of abundance.

I am just as guilty as the next person for living so long in a problem that the solution is no longer available to me as a possibility, so let us commit together tonight to change our lives and move into our true potential, our true glory for what God made us to be: a beacon of hope for the body of Christ in the world. Let us pray:

*Loving God, we know that in you everything is possible. We know that we cannot imagine what goodness you have in store for us and yet we fear and we doubt.. We ask you this night to remove from us in this place all fear and doubt sand fill us with the confidence and the gratitude for what you have given us and all the abundance that you have coming our way.
In the name of all that is holy we pray.*



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Amen.