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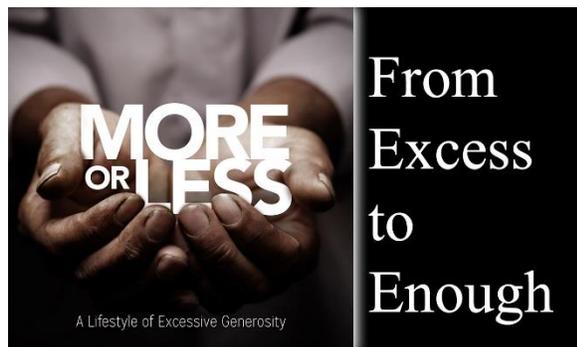
Title: More or less: From Excess to Enough

Preaching: Ryan Hazen, Senior Associated Minister

Scripture: [1 Kings 17:7-16](#)

Text: [2 Corinthians 8:7-15](#)

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Today we begin a sermon series with an overarching theme of “More or Less: A Life of Excessive Generosity” and we begin today with “From Excess to Enough.” “Enough” is a funny word in our language because it holds a different meaning for each individual person. That’s because we all see “enough” through different experiences. Whether we have ENOUGH apples depends on whether we like apples and what we plan to do with the apples. The dictionary definition is really not even a definition –

“occurring in such quantity, quality, or scope as to fully meet demands, needs, or expectations.”¹ Thank you Merriam and Webster, but that’s really not that helpful – “demands, needs and expectations” are all very different things.

How much is enough? That’s the question for the sermon series on which we embark this weekend. Most times that question refers to something tangible – our things. I’m guessing your experience with the definition of “enough” has evolved in a way that is somewhat similar to mine. My first experience of living on my own was going off to college in the fall of 1978. Everything I owned and needed for that trip of 75 miles from my hometown to Kansas State University fit in the back of my Toyota Celica hatchback – don’t judge my car choices. There was even room for a passenger. It was enough. By the time I moved back home the following summer, I had no room for a passenger and needed to take a few things to Goodwill.

A year later, I moved off-campus to a rental house with two other guys and suddenly I began to accumulate furniture and dishes and a vacuum sweeper (which I’m pretty sure we used only once in order to get our deposit back). It was enough. I rented a U-Haul trailer to move home that year. Fast forward through college and I found myself in Indianapolis for graduate school and had moved to a studio apartment. It was everything I needed. In a studio apartment, your bed doubles as your sofa so if you fall asleep watching TV, you’re good for the night. Studio apartments make very efficient use of every square foot of space. It was enough.

After graduating from seminary, I moved to Columbus and into a small one-bedroom apartment. It was enough. But I had a real income and took the plunge and bought a house there. It was a two-bedroom fixer-upper. It was enough. It was in Columbus that I met Ruth. She had just purchased a new four-bedroom home plenty big for all of our stuff and a family. A few years later, we moved to our dream home in Columbus with a bigger yard so of course, I needed a John Deere lawn tractor complete with snow blade. It was delivered on the same day our youngest son was delivered – that’s a story on its own. It was enough. When we prepared to move back to Indianapolis, the moving company estimator said to my wife, “Mrs. Hazen, you have enough stuff.”

We've been – slowly – working on downsizing but the closets and the storage room still contain stuff TOO VALUABLE to get rid of and TOO INSIGNIFICANT to live with. Most times when we wonder if we have enough, we are talking about stuff, things, possessions and we have more than enough and it's not a good thing.

The Christians in Corinth had a similar issue. Corinth was an affluent city and people valued their stuff more than they valued their care for others. Paul has been talking to them about the offering that was being taken for the poor Christians in Jerusalem. In the first year of that offering, the Corinthian church had many conflicts and Paul had fallen out of favor with them. They refused to continue the offering in the midst of the controversy.

By the time Paul writes Second Corinthians, the dissension and conflict have passed and he tells them that it's time to resume the offering. He tells them the main reason to begin again is not so much to help those in need but to help themselves in their spiritual journey. In the process of giving, their faith would be deepened. More than anything, their striving for stuff was strangling their ability to realize fully the blessings of their faith.

He pointed them to the Macedonian church, a church in a depressed area economically but a church that had heard about the offering for the Jerusalem Christians and responded with unbelievable generosity. The scripture says, "they gave according to their means and beyond their means." That one statement about the Macedonian church or any church tells me all I need to know. I know from that one statement that it is a joyful church – a place that I want to be. As we begin to think about our gifts that we will give to this church for the work of ministry in 2020, this becomes the standard measure of Christian stewardship. We're not all asked to give the same amount because we don't all possess the same resources but we are asked to give as an act of worship and with joy.

Many times, usually about this time of year, I'm asked what everyone needs to give to meet the budget. One would think it would be a simple math problem - the budget needs to be divided by the number of people – but it's not that easy because that assumes that everyone makes the exact same amount and are at the exact same place in our life. It's why tithing – giving 10% of income – still makes sense. Ruth and I tithe. We learned from our parents and grandparents that it was the starting place for giving. If just the people in this service tithed to the church, we would oversubscribe our budget and have to look for new ministries to start. We'd pay down our debt and there never would be the need to conduct another capital campaign. Imagine the impact of the entire church doing such a radical thing. Paul would call that "excellence in giving."

A visitor on the island of Guadalcanal in the South Pacific tells about a twelve-year-old boy on that island who understood about excellence in giving. One day he came to his pastor with a large fish he had caught. He explained to the pastor that it was his tithe and asked for instructions as to how to give it to God. The pastor explained that he could sell it at the market, then bring the proceeds and give them to God. The pastor remarked that it obviously had been a good day for fishing since the boy had caught ten fish and was now giving one fish to God. "Oh no," said the boy. "This is the first one. The other nine are still in the ocean. I'm going after them next." 2² There's a young man who knows how to excel in giving.

Jesus never said money is bad. Jesus never said, "Don't enjoy the blessings God has sent you." But here's what Jesus *did* say: time and again he said that the joy and satisfaction we experience in giving will far exceed the joy we have in accumulating. Jesus basically said, "I'm afraid you're going to misunderstand who God really is if you don't correctly understand your posture toward money." It's why he said our

hearts will follow our treasure. Jesus knew that outward discussions about money were indicative of one's inward spiritual journey. This issue is deeper than what you do with your checkbook. Spending is just an outward expression of an inward reality.

For Christians, the idea of ENOUGH has to shift from possessions and things to blessings and relationships where it is impossible to have MORE THAN ENOUGH. "I believe God's blessings are more than enough for me." Those are words that we come to believe in the course of time when we have wrestled through enough difficult circumstances and know that God is in charge. The way we hold on to or release our money reflects our belief in the sufficiency of God and our identity. The earlier reading from First Kings finds Elijah meeting a widow at the town gate and he asks for water and a morsel of bread. Because of the drought in the land, she could not spare anything. It was so desperate that she was going home to prepare to die. When God got involved, there was enough water to drink for her and her jar of meal never was empty.

Sometimes God takes a word like *enough* and gives us opportunities to consider it. As God pushes it deeper into our souls, we learn about who God is, and it begins to transform our lives from the inside out and we realize that ENOUGH to God is not about stuff but about our love of others and our commitment to the message of Jesus Christ.

Over the years of my ministry, I have conducted many funerals and memorial services. As I meet with families, I usually ask the family to tell some stories about their loved one. When I ask a family to relate what they remember, I have NEVER had someone say, "I loved him because of all the stuff he owned, or I loved her because of all of her possessions."

Paul commands the church in Corinth - which didn't look and act much different from us - "But just as you excel in everything in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us see that you also excel in this grace of giving."

Paul didn't apologize for talking about giving to Christ's work and neither will I. He told the Corinthian church that they needed to excel in giving. How do we excel in our giving? What does that look like? It means giving your best, not your seconds - your first fruits of whatever you do, not your leftovers, time that is a priority, not time if you don't have anything else to do.

Each year the Butterball Turkey Company sets up a hotline to answer consumer questions about preparing Thanksgiving turkeys. One year, a woman called to inquire about cooking a turkey that had been in her freezer for twenty-three years! The operator told her it might still be safe to serve the turkey if the freezer had been kept below 0 degrees the entire time. But the operator warned the woman that, even if it were safe, the flavor had probably deteriorated, and she wouldn't recommend eating it. The caller replied, "That's what we thought." Then the woman added these words, "We'll just give it to the church."³

Some people do not excel in giving to God because they do not give God their best. Some give God only what's left over. To this day, I remember my grandfather asking my grandmother if the tithe had been paid. If the answer was, yes, he knew everything else would fall into place.

So, having enough in a spiritual sense is more a matter of the heart than a matter of the wallet. But your giving is a window into your heart. It has often been said that if you want to really understand a person, take a look at their bank statement and see how their money is spent. Even though I knew my mother

well, I learned more about her in her last days because I was managing her checkbook. Looking through her check register confirmed a generosity that was wider and deeper than I imagined.

Today is All Saints Day in the life of our church. That means we remember those in our congregation who have died this year and we remember those in our lives who influenced us. What makes All Saints' Day special is that it's not just about the luminaries of church history that have common names in our religious history: Paul, Mary, Peter, Mother Theresa. Rather, this is a day to remember the people who have gone before us in this place and our lives - those whose voices still speak and whose encouragement keeps us going when we don't want to. I remember my mom and dad, my grandfather and so many others. Even the list before you – my life would be very different without them.

Author Joyce Landorf Heatherley calls them "Balcony People." Balcony People may be gone, but by God's grace, they are still rooting for us. Imagine the key people from your earliest years, applauding you from the upper row of the "balcony" while you remain on the stage, playing out the drama of your life.⁴ All Saints' Day is our annual reminder to do what we can choose to do every day: thank God for those who have poured their time, their energy, and their kindness into our lives - and to resolve that we will not fail to do the same for the next generation.

At first, I thought it odd and awkward that All Saints Sunday fell on the Sunday of our stewardship emphasis. Then, this week in staff meeting we talked about the saints in our lives. Stingy is not a word that describes a saint. I think about those on the list this morning and I look at the names of the Geist Legacy Partners who have committed to make an end of life gift to this congregation and give thanks for the legacy and witness and commitment to their faith that makes each one special.

We have the blessings we have because of others before us sacrificed, did without, and gave of their very best. Your faith guides your daily living. Paul suggests that it guide your giving as well so that you may excel. In response to the love of God for us in Jesus Christ, how can you not excel in your giving as you stand on the shoulders of those who came before us? And with that, I decided that it was exactly right that stewardship coincides with All Saints Sunday.

When your faith informs every aspect of your life including how you use your possessions, you will find that you are never without – that you always have enough, in fact, more than enough.

¹ Definition of "enough" found at www.merriam-webster.com.

² Fish story from sermon by King Duncan titled "Generosity Encouraged" on 2 Corinthians 8:1-15 found at www.sermons.com.

³ Turkey story found at Faithlife Sermons at <https://sermons.faithlife.com/sermons/35998-old-turkey>

⁴ More information on Joyce Landorf Heatherley and her writings and CDs including Balcony People can be found at www.balconypublishing.com