

God's Dream for the World: Enoughism

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Last month, I had the privilege of attending a conference in Holyoke, MA where Marcus Borg was speaking. Marcus Borg is a progressive Christian scholar and theologian- he has written many books, several of which are in our church bookstore. (show books) I recommend all of them; they have changed my life, and how I think and what I believe in. So I was very excited to hear Borg speak. He gave three talks at this conference that really opened my mind and inspired me to try to be a different person. What I learned is that by looking at the Historical Context of the world in which Jesus lived, we can better understand Jesus' teachings and actions, and then we can better apply those teachings to our world today.

Jesus's world can be described as The Ancient Domination system of the Roman Empire. The world was ruled by a few. Ordinary people, the peasant class, had no voice, no rights, and worsening living conditions. The system was extremely economically exploitative. 1/2 to 2/3 of annual wealth went to ruling elites. Herod's great building projects required lots of royal revenue, which meant lots of taxes from the people, which meant that people often found themselves in debt. In addition, land ownership was changing. 50% of the land was owned by just 3 families. And these large agricultural estates were owned by absentee landlords. This resulted in the commercialization of agriculture- people were no longer just farming for themselves and only for what they needed, but now they were trying to produce enough to be

able to export and make money to pay exorbitant Roman taxes and payments to their landlords, and still be able to put food on their own tables.

Into this world, Jesus was born. Growing up, he experienced homelessness, poverty, debt, hunger, violence, and vast inequalities. In this context, Jesus' message developed, a message about God's dream for the world, the Kingdom of God, on earth. It is about the transformation of the world. And everything that Jesus taught had something to do with this Kingdom, this dream, this transformation.

When Jesus taught people how to pray with the Lord's Prayer, it was a prayer about the coming of the Kingdom of God on earth. This kingdom included relief from the burdens of food and debt- the 2 central needs of the people in Jesus' world; to have enough bread - or food- for the day, to have enough of the material basis of existence, and to escape debt and poverty. The Lord's Prayer- "give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts"- petitions for help with material existence and sustenance, is about the transformation of this world.

The Gospel of Luke records a Sermon Jesus gave called the Sermon on the Plain. Our scripture lesson for today comes from this Sermon, and is about the world basically turning upside down, everything completely changing – it's just like what Heike mentioned about Pentecost- the birthday of the church- when the world turns upside down. Jesus gives blessings to the poor (not the poor in spirit, but the poor in possessions), hungry (not spiritually hungry, but physically hungry), those who weep and those who are hated- the persecuted, the exploited, the oppressed. Jesus preaches on the transformation of social and economic conditions, not spiritual states.

Jesus' message, The Kingdom of God – God's dream- is about economic fairness, economic justice, distributive justice, that everybody should have enough of the material basis of existence, not as a result of charity, but as the product of the way the world is put together. God's dream for the world is "enoughism"- that we all have enough of what we need to be fed, to be alive, to be happy, to love and be loved. God wants us all have enough for the material basis of life- enough land and enough food. This might not mean we all have "equal" amount, but we all have "enough."

Some of you may have heard of "Maslovs hierarchy of needs." Maslov states that we need certain things in a particular order in order to develop. It starts with physiological needs- food, water, air; then safety-health, family, resources, employment, property. The needs of love and belonging and esteem, and finally self-actualization. Without enough food, we will never be able to be safe and healthy, and without feeling safe and healthy, we will never be able to feel love, belonging, esteem or self- actualization. We need enough of all those things to develop, but only enough, and all people should be able to have enough. But that is not happening in this world. Many people are taking way more than what they need. And if we take more than we need, then others will not have/get enough of what they need.

The richest fifth of the world:

Consumes 45% of all meat and fish, the poorest fifth only 5%

Consumes 58% of total energy, the poorest fifth less than 4%

Have 74% of all telephone lines, the poorest fifth only 1.5%

Consume 84% of all paper, the poorest fifth only 1.1%

Own 87% of the world's vehicle fleet, the poorest fifth less than 1%

Globally, the 20% of the world's people in the highest-income countries account for 86% of total private consumption expenditures — the poorest 20% a minuscule 1.3%.

We have all heard these statistics...especially the recent chants of the 99% versus the 1%. These numbers go beyond meeting basic needs. Our world today is very similar to the world of Jesus. I don't know about you, but frankly, these statistics make me sick. And kind of hopeless.

I watch a lot of documentaries, read a lot of books, and listen to a lot of NPR. And sometimes it feels like the problems of the world are just too overwhelming to do anything about. Sometimes I feel powerless, I feel insignificant, I feel like nothing I do will ever make a difference. But Marcus Borg reminded me that the world is like a quilt, and our job is find our patch and work on it. So if I value things like love, justice, equality, compassion... maybe my patch could be making my checkbook, my spending habits, reflect those values.

I will be the first admit that I have a problem with this. I love shopping. I love clothes. I love food. I love spending money. Especially because growing up we didn't have much money. So now that I do, I like to be able to spend it. On all kinds of stuff. Stuff that, if I really admit it, I don't really need. I just really want it.

So this is the crux of the issue- how do we differentiate between a want and a need? I think that we, as a society, have confused wants and needs, and a lot of people have raised up their wants way above their needs and way above their abilities to support all those wants. People are no

longer living within their means. What do you really need in your home or in your life? It's really a question that I want you all to answer. What do you really NEED? I have been ruminating on this for the past few weeks, and because I have been struggling to answer this question for myself, I have had difficulty writing this sermon. I think it's something we will all struggle with for the rest of our lives- - the beauty of being in this church, in this community, is that we can struggle with this together- determining what is enough for us, determining what our needs are and what our wants are. But we can all start working on our patch by picking one thing to do in our homes, our families, our lives... even the smallest thing... even simply praying or meditating or thinking about our money issues. We can make a commitment, large or small; to reorient the way we spend our money. We can reorient our lives to reflect the compassion and justice we value.

Some thoughts to reflect on/pray about/meditate on:

How can our family live within our means, having and using "enough"?

What's in our Pantries and refrigerators and closets and attics and basements and garages?

What did Jesus mean when he said *do not store your treasures on earth*?

Imagine what it would be like as a household living on 50,000 a year- which is the median household income.

Don't buy stuff you don't need. Live the Family value of responsible use of money. Enough-ism.

Everything in moderation, find a balance in our lives

And what if this was the family value at the forefront of the nation and election campaigns?

"We can tell our values by looking at our checkbook stubs."—Gloria Steinem, author and activist. What we really value- shown by how we spend our money.

Think about how you decide when to spend money and when to wait. Do you follow a budget?

Your gut? A spending plan? A whim?

Learn how to live within your means. It's too easy to always want more money instead of working with what we have.

Can we see family as crossing lines of heritage and blood and genetics? Can we see our family as the whole human race? What about the whole planet earth? Can we care for all of God's creations as if they were our own flesh and blood? Can we do that by the way we spend and think about money and material possessions?

Audio Adrenaline, a worship rock band, has a song with lyrics about a God shaped hole that each of us has inside of us that we try to fill with money, stuff, food, when really it's God, it's love, it's real relationships, its fulfillment that will fill that hole.

What does it take for us humans to feel full, satiated, satisfied, whole?

How do we fill up that something deep within ourselves, that place in our soul that we think one more flat screen TV or 1000 additional square feet will help fill?

I want to end with one last quote/thought that I found while doing research for this sermon-

If you want to feel rich (fulfilled, blessed), count the things you have that money can't buy- like breath, love, friends, family, sunshine, cool breeze on a spring morning. Maybe then, we will finally feel like we have enough for ourselves, and enough to share. Amen.