

## THE ABUNDANCE OF GOD<sup>1</sup>

Pentecost 9 Year B

2 Sam. 11:1-15; Ps. 14; Eph. 3:14-21; Jn. 6:1-21

Gladstone 25/07/2021

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A well known footballer (let's call him Mike, to avoid his true identity) got a call from his old coach. The coach wanted Mike to do some recruiting for him. Mike said, "Sure coach. What kind of player are you looking for?"

The coach said, "Well Mike, you know there's that kind of fellow that when you knock him down, he just stays down?" Mike said, "We don't want him, do we, coach?"

"That's right, Mike. We don't want him. Then, you know, there's that fellow, you knock him down and he gets up, but you knock him down again and he stays down."

Mike answered, "We don't want him either, do we coach?"

Coach said, "No, we don't want him either. But Mike there's a fellow, you knock him down, he gets up. Knock him down, he gets up. Knock him down, he gets up. Knock Him down, he gets up."

Mike said, "Now that's the guy we want, isn't it coach?"

And the coach answered, "No, we don't want him either. I want you to go and find the guy who's knocking everyone down. That's the guy we want!"

We live in a society that by and large respects people with strength and power—a person who has the get-up-and-go to...well...get-up-and-go—at least for a while...until we activate the old Aussie 'Tall Poppy' removal mode of our culture.

I guess that throughout this drought-, flood-, fire- and COVID-stricken land there are plenty of folk—farmers, home owners, businesses, people from all walks of life, and others—who feel like they have been knocked to the ground, only to find that when they have gotten up again, another blow strikes and they are knocked to the ground again—and so the cycle seems to go on. And we admire them for their ability to keep on going when the going gets tough. That's the Aussie way, isn't it?

As Christians, we have an understanding of a God who has limitless strength and power. Our God, however, is not a God who uses his strength and power to knock people down, rather, we have a God who delights in using his strength and power to pour down upon us an abundance of blessings—to pour down upon us his provision for all things—no

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<sup>1</sup>The basis of this sermon is taken from, Nancy Holloway, *Word Magazine, Publication of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America*, March 1988, pp. 4-5 - [http://www.orthodoxresearchinstitute.org/articles/misc/holloway\\_abundance\\_of\\_god.htm](http://www.orthodoxresearchinstitute.org/articles/misc/holloway_abundance_of_god.htm)

matter what we might be going through. We have a God who knows what we need and even gives it to us before we ask.

We also have a God who gives us, through prayer, the ability or the power, if you like, to be strengthened—to be able to continually get up when we are knocked down—and in that, to be able to comprehend the full greatness of God. It's a power that works in us for the glory of God.

And if, at times we are not convinced of that, a quick look through the New Testament will give us some kind of understanding as to the nature and extent of God's abundance for us.

To those who know and love Christ, the Gospels shine like a richly-textured and complex tapestry, with threads that intertwine with meaning upon meaning to provide food and enlightenment for all who seek its wisdom with humility and joy.

One of the most important of these threads, and perhaps the one that underlines many of the others, is the thread of the "abundance of God" towards his people.

Let's take the first of Christ's miracles, as reported by John, the wedding feast of Cana which hints at the outpouring of the abundance of God's love, to come. Even though here he reprimands his mother for her gentle request, with "Woman . . . my hour has not yet come," but nevertheless proceeds to turn water into wine—not just sufficient for the feast but somewhere around 450 litres of the finest vintage. Can you imagine that—particularly all you teetotalers, out there?

The feeding of the five thousand, the one miracle reported in all four Gospels, continues this theme. When Jesus told his disciples to feed the crowds, all they could produce were five loaves and two fish, from one young lad who had the foresight to come prepared. But by blessing these meagre offerings, he created an abundance from which not only were five thousand (men +) fed and satisfied, but there were twelve baskets of leftovers.

He referred to his kingdom as similar to a mustard seed which even though the smallest of all seeds, when grown becomes a tree so great that the birds of the air can make their nests in its branches.

Jesus' appearance after his resurrection to his disciples at the Sea of Galilee when they had fished all night and caught nothing, was another occasion demonstrating this great abundance. In obedience to his command to cast the net on the right side of the boat, they caught so many fish that they were not able to haul the net in.

Jesus' own words to his disciples referred to the abundance of life which he offered. In fact his mission on earth was described in these terms: "I have come that you might have life in all its abundance—in all its fullness."

And finally, there is the greatest gift of all—that act of total, self-giving love, in which he gave all he could give—the offering up of the Creator for the creature—his death on the cross to win back at the highest possible price, those whom he loved who had gone astray.

Why then this wonderful display of God's abundance? Why does God overwhelm us with his goodness, the bounty of creation, his incredible love, the total giving of himself through his life and death?

He does this because *He* is total love and such love must give totally. It was this love which created us for fellowship and communion with him. It was this love, which was crucified in our rejection of him. And it is this same love which will pursue us to the end of time in his attempt to bring us back to himself.

But, you know, God's abundance is not just given so that we can take and take and keep on taking. The abundance that our God pours out on us, seeks to elicit from us a similar response. He overwhelms us, hoping that when our cup is running over, we will catch some glimmer of its Source. It's given, not to provoke us into becoming obsessed with receiving, but so that we will turn in gratitude to the Giver. He gives to us in order to bring us to Himself. He emptied himself, so that we could be filled. He became nothing so that we might become everything that we can become. The abundance of God knows no bounds. As St. Paul says, *"Eye has not seen nor has ear heard, nor has the heart of man conceived what God has prepared for those who love him."*

Perhaps there have been ways in which you have experienced God's abundance—a prayer answered—a relationship restored—peace in God's presence. But isn't God's abundance found also in matters of the spirit and the heart?—in his forgiveness of sin—in a restored relationship with God. All of these instances that I have mentioned, in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ—are they not merely forshaddowings of the abundance of God's grace and mercy towards us, in the gift of his Son. Such abundance calls for a response from us.

How, then, do we respond to the abundance of God? Well, the best way, I believe, is that we respond in like manner. No more religious tokenism in which we set aside one day, one part of our lives, a bit of our possessions, piece meal to appease the Source and Giver of all Gifts. Rather, we respond to this abundance with total abandonment—by a total outpouring of ourselves in worship, prayer and an obedience to God's call on our lives which can take any road he might call us down—the agenda is his. Our task is to become supple and usable in his hands.

This, then, expresses itself in love and service to our neighbour—to one another—again, not as some kind of panacea to appease our guilt and shame, but as a heart-felt response to God’s love for us. Just as God loves us whether or not we return that love, we must also love one another without expecting to be loved in return—without concern for our spiritual and material profit—but simply for the glory and praise of God and to return to him, in some infinitesimal degree, the love he has given to us.

We respond, to God’s love, then, not only by actions, but by becoming all that God calls us to be—for him. We give him our heart, soul, mind and strength through worship, prayer, meditation and single-minded devotion—then, with our vision clarified by our encounter with him, we turn and open ourselves to the needs of those around us.

As recipients of the outpouring of God’s immeasurable love and forgiveness, we turn to our brothers and sisters—those who have hurt us—those who have wounded us—and forgive them with that forgiveness with which we have been forgiven and love them with that love with which we have been loved.

Paul, in that glorious ending to chapter 3 of Ephesians, remarks on the abundance of God and our own share—our birthright as his sons and daughters—in this abundance. He writes:

*For this reason I pray that, according the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. (Eph. 3:16-19)*

Listen to Paul’s prayer again:

- to be given inner strength through the power of the Holy Spirit,
- to have Jesus Christ dwell in our heart through faith,
- to have the power to comprehend the magnitude of God’s love which surpasses all knowledge (wow, that’s a big one)—and all of this,
- so that you may be filled with the fullness of God.

What more could you possibly ask for?

*Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen. (Eph. 3:20-21)*