

From Scarcity to Abundance: Living the Gift Economy

Scripture: Acts 2: 42-47

Rev Dr. Roberto Ché Espinoza

January 19, 2025

I want to begin this morning by sharing with you a little about me. I started last January as the new pastor and started preaching on community, because I was in need of community.

I am starting my second year here and you should know a few things about me. We need to get to know one another! We are making each other right now.

I have spent a lifetime in academia studying theology, philosophy, and ethics, AND I have spent equal amount of time as an organizer in the world helping people choose community over the hyper individualism of our prevailing world.

So, I come into a traditional setting for church as not only an outsider, but as one who could never be compelled by the institution of the church, but always compelled by the embodied community that is endeavoring to nurture another possible world; also called a church and many other things.

I read the Bible as a philosopher and as a Christian theologian. I have been trained in the transdisciplinary study of theology that uses cultural analysis as a tool to do this work of 21st century theology and ethics.

I explained to the search committee when I was interviewing that people are not returning to church in the same ways as they did in the 50s and 70s. The Jesus movement has moved outside traditional structures; church has changed, and oftentimes looks like eating meals together or doing service related projects.

When I interviewed I pointed out church decline and the failure of churches to remain engaged with the world around them. I also said that people want ritual. But, these rituals look very different than us meeting on Sunday mornings.

So, I spent a lot of time last year meeting people in the community and learning what folks wanted in community. People long for belonging and to be known. They also want ritual.

There is a lot of work to do, and I think over this year we can begin to think together really seriously and ask ourselves how we might resist the scarcity of today and embrace the abundance of God's provision?

The world is changing. We need sanctuary and community ever more these days. I am aware of some of the organizing that is being done on the extreme right to prevent the underside of history from flourishing.

My hope is that today we would be compelled by the Spirit to pivot from scarcity to abundance and learn how to live the gift economy. Erin and I are committing ourselves to the gift economy, an ancient and indigenous practice of a sacred economy. We look to plants and animals and the natural world for wisdom. We know creation is God's first revelation, so how might the natural world teach us right now the wisdom we need to embody?

Introduction

We live in a world consumed by the idea of “not enough.” There’s not enough money, not enough time, not enough resources. We are told to hold tighter, save more, compete harder. This scarcity mindset shapes how we relate to ourselves, to one another, and even to God. It tells us we must fend for ourselves, that survival depends on outdoing our neighbor, and that accumulation is the only path to security.

But what if scarcity is a lie? What if, instead, there is abundance all around us, waiting to be discovered and shared? Robin Wall Kimmerer, in her book *The Serviceberry: An Economy of Abundance*, offers a vision of reciprocity and interdependence that challenges the scarcity mindset. She writes of the serviceberry tree, which produces more fruit than it needs, freely offering its abundance to the birds, bears, and humans who rely on it. In this gift economy, life is sustained not through hoarding, but through sharing.

Today, we’ll explore how God calls us to this kind of abundant living—not just in our individual lives, but as a community of faith.

Scarcity Mindset: A Distorted View

The scarcity mindset is not new. The Bible is filled with stories of people grappling with fear of not having enough. Think of the Israelites in the wilderness, hoarding manna despite God’s promise of daily provision. Their fear distorted their trust in God and their willingness to share with one another.

Scarcity tells us that resources are finite, and we must compete for them. It drives systems of exploitation, overconsumption, and inequality. It tells us to hold tight to what we have, just in case.

Yet, Scripture shows us a different reality. Acts 2 describes the early Christian community:

“All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.”

Here is a picture of abundance—not in material wealth, but in shared life. This community lived out the belief that there was enough for everyone when they trusted in God and one another.

The Gift Economy: Wisdom from Creation

Robin Wall Kimmerer reminds us that scarcity is not the story creation tells. The natural world operates on principles of reciprocity, mutuality, and generosity. The serviceberry tree offers its fruit as a gift, knowing that the birds and animals who eat it will spread its seeds. This interdependence ensures life continues.

Kimmerer writes:

“The currency of a gift economy is relationship: the bonds of gratitude and responsibility that connect us to one another.”

This is the economy God created us for—an economy not of extraction, but of connection. The early church understood this. They practiced mutuality and cooperation, trusting that by giving freely, they would also receive freely.

Practices of Abundance

How can we live into this abundance today, especially in a world shaped by economic precarity and fear? Let me offer three ancient practices that resonate with both Scripture and the wisdom of creation:

1. **Mutuality:** Just as the early church shared everything in common, we are called to share our resources and gifts. This might look like participating in mutual aid networks, sharing skills and tools, or simply showing up for one another in times of need.
2. **Cooperation:** Creation thrives on collaboration. The bees pollinate the flowers, and the flowers feed the bees. What if we viewed our relationships the same way? What if our churches became hubs of cooperation, where everyone's gifts were valued and everyone's needs met?
3. **Underconsumption:** In a culture that equates abundance with excess, we are called to live simply. Jesus said, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth." Practicing underconsumption means taking only what we need, leaving room for others and for the earth to flourish.

A New Imagination for Abundance

Abundance begins with a shift in imagination. It's not about having more, but about seeing differently. When Jesus fed the 5,000, he didn't start with enough food for a crowd. He started with a boy's small offering of bread and fish, and through gratitude and sharing, it became more than enough.

What small offering can we bring? What would happen if we trusted God and one another enough to share what we have, believing there is enough for all?

The gift economy invites us to see our lives as part of an interconnected whole. It invites us to trust that when we give freely, we are drawn into deeper relationships of gratitude and care.

Call to Action

As a church, we are called to model this abundant life. How might we become a gift to the world? Perhaps it's through starting a community pantry or joining efforts for mutual aid. Perhaps it's through committing to underconsume, so that others may simply live. Whatever it looks like, it begins with trust—trust in God's provision, trust in the earth's abundance, and trust in each other.

Conclusion

Kimmerer writes,

"We are showered every day with gifts, but they come to us only as we open our hands to give them away."

Friends, let us open our hands and hearts. Let us live as if there is enough—enough grace, enough love, enough resources to sustain us all. For in God's economy, abundance is not a fantasy; it is the ground of our being.

May we live the gift economy, here and now, and discover the deep joy of lives rooted in abundance.

Prayer

God of abundance,
Teach us to trust in your provision.
Loosen our grip on fear and scarcity,
And open our hearts to mutuality and generosity.
May we become, like the serviceberry,
A source of nourishment and joy for the world.
Amen.