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Epiphany 9A Sharing Enough
Peace, Seattle
March 6, 2011 epk
Philippians 4:12-13, Luke 5:1-7

SHARING ENOUGH

It was a Friday afternoon in October, and the professor was handing back our first graded papers of the semester—the first of my college career. I'd worked hard on it, and awaited the results with great anticipation. But when I saw the grade, my face fell. It was not what I'd hoped for.

First time out of the chute and it felt like I'd gotten bucked off.

Deflated, I headed over to my best friend's dorm room. We'd talked about going out that night, and now it was just what I needed to get my mind off of things. But when I checked his room, I found he'd already left—with a group of other guys from the dorm.

I had no car and no idea where they'd gone—remember, this was 1975—long before cell phones, email, and text messaging! But I was determined to get off campus nonetheless.

So I went to my room and started throwing things in my backpack. A change of clothes. My pocket-knife and sleeping bag. Raingear. I had a $10 dollars in my wallet and that would have to do.

I pulled on my hiking boots and headed for the highway. I wanted to go somewhere—anywhere—and so I stood on the onramp to 512, stuck my thumb out, and waited for a ride…

…and eventually, I got one, but it didn't get me far…only to downtown Tacoma, which wasn't very pretty 35 years ago. I stuck out my thumb again, but the hour was getting late. The chances of a driver stopping were growing dimmer by the minute. I'd have to start thinking about where to spend the night.

I found a pay phone and called the local police station. IS THERE A YOUTH HOSTEL NEARBY—SOMEWHERE I COULD SPEND THE NIGHT? I asked.

THE SALVATION ARMY RUNS A DOWNTOWN SHELTER, came the reply. YOU CAN TRY THERE.

When I arrived, the door under the red neon JESUS SAVES sign was locked. I knocked, and kept on knocking until it opened and I was greeted by a middle-aged man with a wizened face. I could sense him studying me.

Was there room for me tonight? YES. Could I stay here? YES.

He opened the door and led me down a dimly lit hallway into a room with a half-dozen beds.
The aroma was pungent…a mixture of unwashed bodies, stale beer, and cleaning solution.
The other occupants were already asleep and the room fairly groaned with snores from every quarter.
I was certain that none of the men in those beds had showered in a good long while; and none had abandoned his college dorm room for this.

The feelings of disappointment and self-pity that prompted me to leave campus were long behind me now as I stood, improbably, in this Salvation Army dorm. I didn't belong here, but here I was, and I was determined now to make the best of it.

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My host showed me my bed and gave me a towel. THE HEAD IS DOWN THE HALL, he said. BREAKFAST AT 7:30 SHARP. YOU'LL HAVE TO DO YOUR SHARE.

I nodded, thanking him, stowed my pack and boots under the bed, and after using the bathroom, I stretched out on the thin mattress for what remained of the night.

I can't tell you all the thoughts that ran through my mind as I waited for sleep to come, but I remember this: HOW PRIVILEGED YOU ARE ERIK, TO HAVE A PLACE IN THE WORLD AND A FAMILY THAT LOVES YOU. TO BE HERE BY CHOICE AND NOT BY CIRCUMSTANCE.
TO HAVE A PAST YOU AREN'T RUNNING FROM. TO HAVE ENOUGH AND THEN SOME.

When the lights came on at 7 a.m. I was famished. I'd missed dinner on campus the night before this little adventure began, and now I was hoping breakfast, whatever it was, would fill the hole a bit.

The kitchen and dining hall were crude but functional. This shelter had been here for a good while. The cook, one of the residents, was frying up eggs in a pan. I peaked at them, floating there in what looked like a good half-inch of grease. Hmmm. There were hotcakes on the counter, too. I decided those would have to do.

There wasn't much talk as we ate the meal. No doubt there were stories a plenty behind each face there, but all the plotlines had ended badly—and so I kept a lid on my curiosity, growing more aware with each passing moment at how different was the life I had lived and would live from these busted souls.

After breakfast I was given a broom, and I was grateful for it—grateful to make a contribution, meager as it was, an offering for the experience I was having, and for the windows it opened—within my self and to this shadow universe of brokenness and need I'd stumbled upon.

When the chore was done, I left, grateful for the experience and more grateful still for the clear autumn sky and a renewed sense of possibilities.

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HOW MUCH IS ENOUGH? WHAT DOES ENOUGH LOOK LIKE IN YOUR LIFE?

"I know what it is to have little," wrote Paul, "and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me." (Philippians 4:12-13)

Do you hear how counter-cultural that sounds?
Hundreds of times a day, from every quarter in our culture, we are told our lives cannot be complete unless we make this purchase, unless we acquire this device, unless we have more.

Our market driven economy defines us primarily not as marvelous, varied, creative human beings, God-breathed miracles with talents and gifts for creating and sustaining families and communities… but as CONSUMERS.

Do you hear how narrow that is? How limiting? To be defined by what demographic category we occupy? To have our relative value plotted according to how much disposable income we possess? To be defined by our appetite for material objects?

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If Jesus, and not the market, is Lord of our lives, what might pushing back against that cultural expectation look like?

If Jesus, and not the market, is Lord in our lives, are we not empowered to act differently, over against the self-focused, over-consumptive trends of contemporary society?

When Jesus is Lord of our lives we participate in a new reality—of stretching out our hands, not so that we can grasp even more for ourselves to assuage our perceived lack, but so that out of our abundance, an abundance that God provides, we can share what we have with others.

When Jesus is Lord of our lives, there is enough and then some—the nets our bursting!

As good news people you and I are stewards of a sacred treasure of truth, a message proclaimed and lived by Jesus, a message that says:
THE ABUNDANCE I GIVE IS UNEARNED AND UNEARNABLE.
MY GENEROSITY CAN SHAPE YOURS. THE LIFE I'M CALLING YOU TO LIVE IS FULFILLING, RICH, SATISFYING, ENOUGH.

But are we willing to let God have that much market share in our lives?
Are we willing to follow Jesus out into those deeper waters?

As we grow in the life Jesus offers and follow in the way Jesus walked, we join the journey of a giving people, a people who find joy and meaning in life not through what we acquire and cling to, but through what we let go of and share with others.

St. Paul again:
GOD IS ABLE TO PROVIDE YOU WITH EVERY BLESSING IN ABUNDANCE SO THAT BY ALWAYS HAVING ENOUGH OF EVERYTHING, YOU MAY SHARE ABUNDANTLY IN EVERY GOOD WORK.

We get it. So, let's live it.

Prayer.
God of abundance, in Jesus, your son, you show us how to live in this world, how to give, how to share. And through your generosity we have received more than enough.
Conform our lives to his, so that we might share abundantly in every good work. Amen.