

***“Extravagance: The Always More of God”***

Hearts Unbound! Sermon Series

Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia

Season of Pentecost, Sunday, June 12, 2016

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Holy Scriptures: Galatians 5:22-6:10 (RSV)

<sup>22</sup> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law. <sup>24</sup> And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. <sup>25</sup> If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. <sup>26</sup> Let us have no self-conceit, no provoking of one another, no envy of one another.

Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Look to yourself, lest you too be tempted. <sup>2</sup> Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. <sup>3</sup> For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. <sup>4</sup> But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor. <sup>5</sup> For each man will have to bear his own load.

<sup>6</sup> Let him who is taught the word share all good things with him who teaches. <sup>7</sup> Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. <sup>8</sup> For he who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption; but he who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. <sup>9</sup> And let us not grow weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we do not lose heart. <sup>10</sup> So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

## ***The Always More of God***

Decatur professor and pastor Walter Brueggemann speaks of the “always more of God.”

Let’s be honest with each other and especially ourselves:  
We think all is over, that there isn’t enough,  
that supplies and spirits and souls are scarce.

And then here comes God, promising abundance.  
And when God promises, the Good Lord delivers.  
More!

Always more!

With God there is always more!

More grace, more joy, more love, and even more life after life  
on earth is done.

In the loving presence of God we find we have more than  
enough;  
we discover an abundance, an overflowing,  
an extravagance of love and mercy, of hope and hospitality.

Brueggemann the teacher is good at teaching us  
the contrast between scarcity and abundance.

We live with what he calls “anxious scarcity.”

Anxious scarcity: we know all too well what that looks like,  
smells like, sounds like...

We think we would be happier, more content, more at peace  
if only we had 20% more.

If only we had 20% more of what we think we lack,

then surely we would be satisfied, content, at peace.  
Twenty percent more money, more savings,  
more time to myself or to do what I love;  
20% more closet space, more room in the  
waistband of my clothes.  
You may have heard it said,  
*“What Americans lack is a sense of enough.”*

“We never think we have enough of anything; we always  
want more.  
But the Bible operates with the idea of abundance.  
There is enough.  
[The Lord does provide.]  
The story of the loaves and fishes is a paradigm of God’s  
abundance,  
the saving antidote to the anxiety of scarcity.”[\[1\]](#)  
The resurrection of Jesus from the dead into life everlasting  
is a paradigm of God’s abundance,  
evidence that the nature of God is to always  
start something new.  
The teaching of Paul in Galatians of the gifts of the spirit,  
gifts that overflow and overcome us with their  
abundance.  
**Galatians 5: 22-23**  
*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace,  
patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,  
gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law.*  
There is an extravagance of the fruits of the spirit;  
thanks be to God, we have more than enough, and to spare!  
One of the ways we know God is God  
is by our Creator’s distinguishing characteristic  
of an ability to create something new,  
and to do so with such extravagance.  
No half-stepping here.  
God started and greatness grew, from the small and simple

to the mighty and amazing!  
God started a new cosmos out of chaos;  
    a new nation out of a wandering Armenian;  
        a new liberation movement out of a baby  
named Moses;  
            a new Temple and a new Jerusalem and  
a new people of God  
                out of the lost, the last and the  
least.

God built a new church out of frightened disciples;  
    a new Disciples of Christ movement out of frontier  
men and women;  
        and a significant church here in Decatur in the  
Shealy living room  
            95 years ago on a Christmas afternoon  
                with barely two dozen souls.

*Merry Christmas, indeed! Seasons greetings!*

The abundant gift of Christian hospitality graces Decatur  
still!

So put away and put behind you and put off any fears of  
scarcity.

Brush off and move beyond any temptation  
to be lured by anxious feelings or thoughts of scarcity.  
Instead choose to take on, to claim, to celebrate  
the always more, the extravagance, the abundance of God.

### ***The Always More of God***

God, who is so extravagant in bestowing gifts upon you,  
welcomes your sharing of your gifts with the world.  
Sometimes we discover that our best gifts evolve out of tough  
circumstances.

One of my gifts emerged because I remember what a mess I  
was at age 13, 14, 15...

and how important and invaluable and life changing it  
was for me

that folks in my home church family  
loved me and forgave me and sent me  
forth

with an extravagantly generous  
dose of grace.

So, my friends, the way it works in the spiritual realm  
is that I am called to give back, as are you!

One way I give back – or pay it forward -- is by working and  
playing with teenagers.

Most every year I serve Christ and His Church

by serving as a church camp director or counselor of  
keynote speaker.

What a hoot!

This afternoon right after our Appreciation Reception for the  
Day Campers,

I'll load up the church van with Jacob, Ariadne, Stahr,  
Ryan, and Will

and we will head off to Gordon GA.

We will make new friends and new memories.

Like the memory I have of the fourth year in a row at church  
camp

with a young man named Trey.

When we got to camp Trey looked up at my profile for a  
couple minutes,

then said, "*Mr. James, your nose is longer than I  
remember from before.*"

One summer a small group of four highly energetic boys  
were the snack crew.

Each night at 9 PM we went to the director's trailer

to pick up the camp's evening snacks.

Each night the director said the same thing to Bryan, age 12.

He said, *“Son, you need to tie your shoes. You could trip and fall.”*

Well, truth be known, Bryan never tied his shoes all week. On the last night of camp we held a talent show.

Joseph, also 12, said to Bryan,

*“You know what you could do in the talent show?*

*You could tie your shoes in front of everybody.*

*You stand on stage and we’ll say,*

*‘Bryan will tie his shoes for the first time in 10 years!’”*

That summer our camp theme was *“Under God’s Roof.”*

In the midst of living in Camp Christian for a week

we sought to connect body and mind and soul.

In the midst of small groups

there was Bible study, trust exercises, and arts and crafts.

In the midst of all-camp gatherings

there was singing, faith-sharing, Bible knowledge challenges, kick ball games,

water balloon tosses, capture the flag, and worship.

Such beautiful worship;

each service was entirely planned and lead by young people.

After the talent show we prepared ourselves for our final evening vespers.

When we were ready and focused,

worship began with a drama.

A boy named Nick walked up the aisle with a small stone in his hand.

He placed it on a Bible atop the communion table and said, *“I am a doctor under God’s roof.”*

He was followed by a girl who placed another small stone next to it and said,

*“I am an attorney under God’s roof.”*

One after another came a long line of 12 and 13 and 14 year olds,

placing stones atop a Bible and saying,

*“I am an engineer... I am an accountant... I am a cook... I am a teacher... I am a minister... I am a truck driver... I am Disciple of Christ...”*

and each one claimed a spot under God’s roof.

The last person to approach the Communion Table was a 13-year-old named Jeremiah.

He hurriedly strode up to the table and shouted,

*“I don’t want to live under God’s roof!”*

and he threw his rock onto the floor,

and then he swept all the stones off the table.

### ***The Always More of God***

Life in the church brings with it the joys, responsibilities, heartaches, and challenges of living in community under God’s roof.

Life in the church can make you strong,

fill your life with meaning, purpose and a solid sense of fulfillment.

Life in the church can drive you crazy,

because it’s rarely easy or simple or clean and neat when seeking to find common ground with people from all walks of life.

Sometimes folks quit, leave, and get the heck out of Dodge.

Sometimes folks watch churches from a distance and see fights and disagreements

and ask, *“How can they preach love to me if they can’t practice love with each other?”*

Churches, especially family sized churches,

require a great deal of patience and the practice of

active listening skills.

We need to be able to laugh together,  
and to laugh at ourselves.

We are called to do community service and to serve one another.

We have to have fun in the midst of ministry,  
lest we die from boredom and repetition.

And we are commissioned to learn how to differ in opinion and ideas,

without ever losing sight of our common mission:  
to be and to share the Good News of Jesus Christ.

How many times has someone joined a community of faith,  
all excited and enthusiastic and filled with optimism,  
only to leave soon afterward?

She left because they wouldn't do things her way.

He left because they did things he didn't support.

She left because they changed.

He left because they wouldn't change.

She left because they were too inclusive, too tolerant for her tastes.

He left because they were too exclusive, too narrow minded.

She left because she didn't get her way.

He left because he didn't get his way.

Folks sure think they like to be in control.

Our deep need to be in control is the fly in the ointment.

And yet, my friends, Jesus' call to Christian discipleship is a call to relinquish control,

to give up and over and away our lives to God,  
allowing the extravagant love of Jesus Christ to enter in and direct us.

The call to the church is the same:



the community of faith is to heed the call to  
discipleship,  
to go down to the river and meet Jesus at the  
water;  
we are to go down to the river  
and do ministry amongst the hurt and hurting;  
let's go down to the river  
and celebrate the diversity of people and ideas,  
dreams and ministries.  
When we recognize our sameness we are freed to celebrate  
our diversity.

Let's go down to the river  
and put up a canopy as wide and open as the  
extravagant love of Jesus.

### ***The Always More of God***

Thanks be to God, through the Cross of Jesus Christ  
that God gave the world God's greatest reconciling  
gift: love.

God's love has the power to help folks overcome all  
differences and disagreements.

God's love engages us to move through and beyond our  
disappointment

to the blessings of reconciliation.

Trust me, I will disappoint you;

the Church will disappoint you;

someone here will disappoint you.

Guaranteed.

Disappointments are speed bumps we turn into mythical  
mountains.

Go over them anyway.

Decide right now, right now that you will stick around,  
move though the hard and hurt feelings,

and work together toward reconciliation.  
The extravagant gift of joy that awaits us on the other side of  
disappointment  
is so worth the effort, the pain, and the challenge.  
God's love helps us to see beyond the arguments, whether  
petty or weighty,  
and our need for control and to have our own ways.  
God's love brings us ever closer to the peace we seek and  
reconciliation we crave,  
we so desperately need,  
a gift of the always more of God.  
Under God's roof we find we are transformed  
into a dwelling place for God.

### ***The Always More of God***

As the final evening of church camp drew to a close  
and the vespers service was about to end,  
suddenly Joseph walked slowly up the aisle.  
Around his neck was a name tag that read, "Jesus."

Joseph as Jesus approached the communion table,  
and then stooped down low.  
Jesus knelt down and began to pick up all the stones  
that children had put there and that Jeremiah had  
scattered.  
Carefully, slowly, methodically Jesus began to place them  
atop a Bible.  
Last but not least,  
Jesus picked up Jeremiah's rock and then turned to us  
and said,  
*"Everyone lives under my roof."*

Everyone lives under God's roof.  
There is room under God's roof,

under the canopy of Jesus' love,  
for all people.

There is room enough for you, and you, and you, and all of us  
together.

There is room in our nation for all viewpoints and opinions.  
The moment we seek to control  
or dominate

or insist on our own way,

then the room gets very small, indeed.

Diversity is diminished and tolerance takes a vacation from  
reality.

In the church, in the community, in the country  
we can make room in our hearts and minds for those  
with whom we differ,

for those with whom we disagree,

for those whom Christ insists we  
practice tolerance and grace.

Come to the Table

where everyone is invited to live  
and breathe

and have meaning.

Decide to dedicate your life right now to being a channel  
for the always more of God's grace,  
and may the reconciling peace of Christ  
become the cornerstone of our lives,  
under a holy roof made of love.

*All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy  
Spirit. Amen!*

[1] [John M. Buchanan](#), “Time for poetry”, Christian Century, Aug 12, 2010.