

Abundance
[Mark 10:17-31](#)
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There's a famous painting by the American artist Norman Rockwell, this iconic image of a happy family gathered around a Thanksgiving table, as the matriarch of the family carries in this enormous, perfectly roasted turkey for her husband to carve. The painting is called Freedom from Want, and it's part of a series of paintings inspired by Franklin Roosevelt's Four Freedoms: Freedom of Speech, Freedom of worship, freedom from fear and freedom from want. For some reason, the other paintings didn't catch on quite so well, and this is the one that people remembered. But as beloved as this painting is now, at the time it was first painted, it wasn't so popular. Rockwell painted this work in 1943, during the second world war, and the image of this extravagant meal and all the abundance of food and luxury presented here didn't go over so well while much of the world was very much not free from want, and was in fact starving, deprived of their most basic needs by the Nazi and Japanese occupations. Rockwell himself later admitted that "the Europeans sort of resented this painting because it wasn't freedom from want, it was overabundance, the table was so loaded down with food."

And they've got a point – here in North America, when we think Thanksgiving, we think overindulgence, overabundance – eating so much you need to loosen your belt afterwards, leftover turkey for days, a cornucopia stuffed with all the fruits of the harvest. When you have so much, such obvious plenty all around you, of course you're thankful, because there's just so much to be thankful for. But when you don't have such an abundance, when the table is bare and the world around you is falling apart, it's a lot harder to be thankful. When people you love are far away or have passed away, when all you see is trouble and pain everywhere, it's a lot harder to be thankful. If we think that thanksgiving means overabundance, a full table, a full house, and you're running on empty, then it's a lot harder to be thankful.

Keep that in mind as we read today's passage from the gospel of Mark. Here we meet a man straight out of a Norman Rockwell painting, a man who seems to have it all, every blessing you can think of, this guy has it in abundance. He's a rich man with many possessions, and he's also a good man, someone who has done his best to follow all the commandments, all the laws of Moses since he was a young man. This is no villainous billionaire like Jeff Bezos or Elon Musk; this is a good, rich man. He's got it all. And yet there's one thing he's not so sure that he's got: the most important thing – eternal life, hope that there is something more after death. When all his wealth and all his virtue are no longer any help to him, what will become of him?

So he comes to Jesus for help – he's a smart man too, he knows that Jesus is someone who will have answers, so he seeks out Jesus and falls down at his feet and asks him, Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life? This man has it all, everything in abundance, and now he wants Jesus to show him the way to find the one thing he desires, the one thing he lacks – eternal life.

And Jesus is happy to answer his question. He tells him that there is only one more thing he needs – on top of his virtue, on top of his wealth, there's just one more little thing he needs. He needs to lose. He needs to lose his abundance, lose his wealth, lose all his possessions, every single one, he needs to lose it all, sell it all, give it all away, and then come and follow Jesus Christ. The only thing keeping him from enjoying eternal life, the only thing keeping him from receiving treasures in heaven for all eternity, is his abundance, his wealth, all the stuff he has accumulated. If he wants eternity, he must lose his abundance and make room in his life for Jesus Christ. And that's a hard thing for this man to do. He's spent so much of his life, so much time and effort building up all those possessions, all that virtue, all that abundance that he currently enjoys, that he doesn't want to let any of it go, let alone all of it. Let alone everything. So he walks away, defeated and dejected, because he doesn't want to lose his abundance, the one thing he needs to do to inherit eternal life.

Now, you might hear that, and think, okay then, the moral of the story is, God wants us to be poor. If God wants us to give up everything we've got, and give it all away, then God must want us to have nothing. And far too many sermons preached in far too many churches have said exactly that, that being poor is a good thing, that you should be happy if you don't have enough to eat or clothes to wear, so just be content with what little you have – which is a very convenient message for rich people to tell the poor: now, now, please don't come to our mansions with your pitchforks and guillotines, because this is what God wants! You're really the lucky ones here. But if you actually look at what Jesus is saying, you'll see that this isn't actually true. When Peter points out that they've given up everything to follow Jesus, Jesus promises him that they will be blessed, here and now, in this life – everyone who has given up house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or property, for my sake and for the Good News, will receive now, here today, in return a hundred times whatever they've lost. Jesus' doesn't want his followers to suffer, to be miserable – poverty is not a virtue, something that Christians are meant to seek out. But neither is abundance. Neither is wealth. God's plan for us isn't either extreme wealth or extreme want, either poverty or abundance. Jesus promises that when we give up what we have to follow him, we will get it back – we will be blessed with a community of faithful followers of Christ around us, with everything we need to survive and thrive and then share

with the world around. When we have too much, God calls us to give up what we have, give it away and trust that God will provide us with what we truly need – that the things we give up will return to us, so that they can be shared again with the people we meet. If the rich man had been able to trust Jesus enough to give up his abundance, give up all the possessions he considered so important, he would've received those blessings, all that abundance back again, along with the blessings of eternal life in the world to come.

And that's because the one thing that the man truly, truly needed, the one thing that was more valuable, more precious than anything else in the world, was the one thing he actually had in abundance, and he didn't realize it. Here in this story, the man was given everything he needed to gain everlasting life and every blessing in the world, and he didn't even notice. Take another look at the story. Mark tells us that Jesus looks at this man, and loves him. Jesus gives him his love, the love of God, and that is a resource that will never run out, that is a possession that can never be lost or taken away. And when you have the love of God, when Jesus Christ looks at you and loves you, then you have everything you need. If the only thing in the world you have is the love of God, then you have everything you need. You have it all, in abundance. When you know you are loved by God, you know beyond a shadow of a doubt that there is nothing that can threaten you, nothing that can harm you, nothing that can ever separate you from that endless,

boundless, abundant love. When you know you are loved by God, you can give away everything you've got, sell every possession, give it all away, because you know that God won't let you fall, God's blessings and providence will keep you strong and provide you with what you need. And that doesn't mean it'll always be easy – Jesus promises his disciples that along with blessings, there will be persecution, there will be pain and trouble on the road ahead – but that pain cannot triumph over God's love. Trouble and worry and disease and death, they cannot triumph over God's love. God's love is ours in abundance, it cannot run out, it will not run out, not today, not tomorrow, not for all eternity.

And when you know you are loved by God, when you know you've got God's love in abundance, then you know you always have reason to be thankful. Even when times are tough, when the table is bare and friends are far away, the love of God is still abundant, there is still reason to be thankful. In those moments when we lose, when we struggle, we can still be thankful, because we know these are moments when we can rely on the love of God more and more, we can see that our strength comes not from our own wealth and resources, our virtue, our wisdom. Our strength comes from the fact that Jesus Christ looks on us, and loves us, and that is all we need.

And in those moments of struggle, as we rely on the strength of God's love to help us stand, we will see that strength in the community of faith we have been given. Christ promised his followers that when we give up all we've got to follow him, then here in this world we will get a hundred times more homes, family and fields than what we've lost. This place where we gather is a home God has given us. The people around us here are the family God has blessed us with. And the world all around us is the field God has given us to work, to go out to our neighbours and friends and share what we've been given, to plant and tend and harvest so that through all we say and do, the people we meet will come to understand that they are loved abundantly by Jesus Christ.

Everywhere we look, we have reason to be thankful, because God's love is always with us. We can thank God for the blessings we receive, the good things we enjoy, and we can thank God for the trials, for the moments when we lose, because we know this is an opportunity to depend once more on our Father's love. We can give thanks in all circumstances, because in all circumstances we are loved, abundantly loved, by our savior and King, and in that love, we have everything we need to live, everything we need to share, so that as we give what we have, the world will know the love of Jesus Christ through everything we say and do. In the name of Jesus Christ - Amen!