

The Abundance of Shared Poverty

John 6:1-15

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Video and audio versions available online:

<https://relentless-love.org/sermons/the-abundance-of-shared-poverty-2/>

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Message

In all honesty, nothing stresses me out quite like preaching. But for a variety of reasons, I believe I'm called to do it. Like Jesus said to Peter, "Peter, feed my sheep."

I wake up in the middle of the night to this terrifying question: "Hey Peter, how are you going to feed the sheep?" Along with: "Who are you to talk about God? How are you going to be concise, and understandable, yet profound, and not a heretic? And just what is it that you're trying to say?" "Hey Peter, how are you going to feed the sheep?" At 3:00 a.m., I don't think it's Jesus that's asking me that question.

Sometimes when I can't sleep, I'll think about role models that I like to emulate. I used to think about my old friend Tim Brewer.



Tim would come speak at our high school youth group in the late 70s. He used to lead the CSU fellowship in Fort Collins — hundreds of students. Tim was the high school youth director at Bel Air Presbyterian Church before I took his place just a few years later. I still remember my youth elder saying to me: "Yeah Peter, that Tim Brewer — he just had a silver tongue, a silver tongue." I wanted to be just like Tim. Tim was a great communicator, but also a really great guy:

affectionate, kind, compassionate, sincere, sensitive, warm and unstoppable fun. He became a senior pastor in my denomination just a few years before I did. He had a wife and three children, two of whom had disabilities.

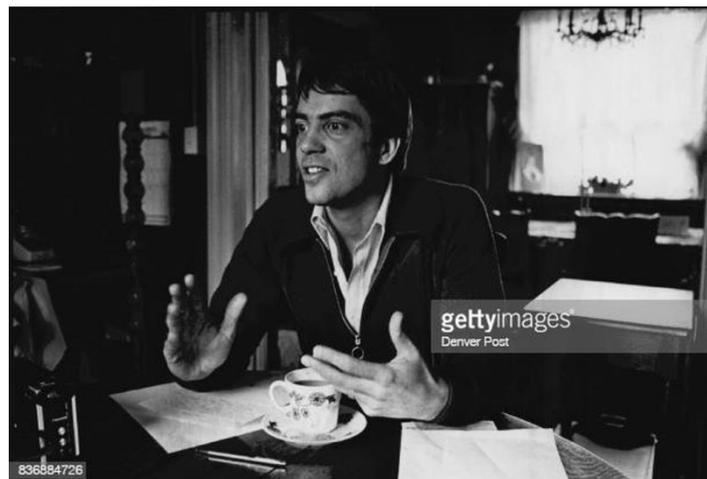
In 1995, he had a strange little “accident:” He lost his foot while hiking through a train tunnel. The train almost killed him. At the General Assembly, we all prayed for him. He came forward as the whole assembly gave him a standing ovation. He said a few words, beautiful words. I looked in the General Assembly notebook and saw that his congregation had grown a lot, and I was jealous.... That’s what happens when you compete. You do the work of the devil for him and turn yourself into a beast.

Four weeks after the Assembly, Tim was on vacation with his family at Hilton Head Island. One day in late August, he got up, left his family, and returned to St Louis alone. He went to the garage, ran a hose from the exhaust pipe to the interior of his car, turned on the ignition, and asphyxiated himself, leaving behind his wife, three children, and a very confused congregation. He left a letter for his church and session (a public letter), which was sent to all his fellow pastors in the denomination. I’ll read just a few lines:

I know of nothing which any of you could have done to change my situation. Out of the countless sins that I have committed in this life, it is my own wretched weakness of which I am most ashamed. God forgive me for not being any stronger than I am. Forgive me for being such an unfaithful shepherd. But never doubt that God’s Word remains true, even if the messenger has fallen. Upon that one hope, I have staked my entire life.

Yours, in the name of our blessed Lord, our only hope in life and death,
Tim

I think Tim was haunted by a voice: “Tim, how are you going to feed the sheep, feed your wife, your kids? How are you — depressed and lonely — gonna’ do it?”



I suspect that Bruce McBogg was haunted by the same voice. I got to know Bruce when I spent a night with him sleeping on the streets of Denver. Bruce had an amazing testimony. In prison, he met Jesus. And years later, he founded Christ's Body Ministries. He ministered to thousands on the streets of Denver. However, about 20 years ago, he hung himself from the balcony in his home. He was a beautiful man, but I know he struggled with that question: "How are you going to feed the sheep, Bruce?"

I did Bruce's funeral, and I did Jim Turner's funeral.



Some of you knew Jim; he was a part of our church body twelve years ago. Jim had been a very successful but rather legalistic pastor, until his life fell apart and he discovered Grace...or Grace discovered Jim. He wrote a book, titled *In the Dark Places, Grace*.

Twelve years ago, Jim had been absent from church for a while. I hadn't called. And then, I heard that alone, in a depression and drinking too much, he took his own life. He, too, left a note. In it, he asked that I do the funeral. That was tough. I know he struggled with this question: "How are you going to feed the sheep, Jim?" I ended the memorial service with another question: "How do I know that in 10 years I won't do what Jim just did?"

I have more stories about more friends, but I think you all know the questions:

- "How are you going to feed your family?"
- "How are you going to speak life into your friends?"
- "How are you going to provide for the people you love?"
- "How are you going to feed the sheep?"

John 6:1-6:

After this Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. ² And a large crowd was following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick [*astheneo*: be sick, be weak]. ³ Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples. ⁴ Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand. ⁵ Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a large crowd was coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we [not

“you,” but “we”) to buy bread, so that these people may eat?” ⁶ He said this to test [peirazo: to tempt, to test] him, for he himself knew what he would do.

I think Scripture testifies (James 1:13) that God tempts no one to evil, yet I think he does tempt us to good, that we might choose the Good.ⁱ Satan tempted Jesus to turn stones into bread in order to impress the masses and make himself King, but Jesus refused the temptation and passed the test, saying, “Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.” He is the Word, and He is the King, and He is the Bread.

John 6:7-15:

Philip answered him, “Two hundred denarii worth of bread would not be enough for each of them to get a little.” ⁸ One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother [Peter, Andrew, and Philip were all from Bethsaida which was adjacent to this field] — Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to him, ⁹ “There is a boy [paidarion: little boy] here who has five [pente] barley loaves and two fish [opsarionii], but what are they for so many?” ¹⁰ Jesus said, “Have the people [anthropos] sit down.” Now there was much grass in the place. So, the men [anthropos] sat down, about five thousand [pentakischilio — sounds like “pentacost” doesn’t it?] in number. [Matthewⁱⁱⁱ indicates that this refers to heads of families, so we’re talking about 15 or 20 thousand people] ¹¹ Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks [eucharisteo—it’s where we get our word “Eucharist”], he distributed them to those who were seated. So also the fish, as much as they wanted. ¹² And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, “Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost [apollumi: “be lost, be destroyed”]¹³ So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves left by those who had eaten. ¹⁴ When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, “This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!” ¹⁵ Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

People always ask, “What would Jesus do if he were president?” And here’s your answer: He’d run away. Political power was the temptation of the Evil One. Jesus knows that we cannot get to our destination that way — not by seizing control, but only by surrendering control, like a little boy. Jesus runs away from the crowd; he’s not into “crowds, but “A body thou hast prepared for me,” said Christ, “as he came into this world (Heb. 10:5).” ^{iv}

Sign #1: Water to Wine at a Wedding Feast

Sign #2: Healing the Body of the Father's Sick Child

Sign #3: A Lame Body That Becomes the Temple of Mercy

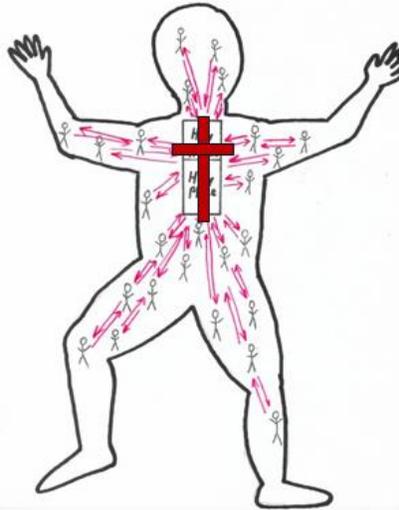
Sign #4: Broken Bread That Becomes a Party in a Field by the Sea.

Sign #5: Sight to the Man Born Blind

Sign #6: One Man (Lazarus) Raised From the Dead

Sign #7: ***“Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.”***

If you've been following our series in John, you know that this is the fourth sign that points to the seventh sign, which is also the substance. The first was a wedding feast. The second was a weak body made strong. The third was a broken body that becomes a temple. The fourth is a party that breaks out in a field by the sea.



The Last (*eschatos*) Thing
The 7th Sign that is the Substance

“Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.”

The seventh sign is what Jesus said at the start of this Gospel: “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”

- It's what John sees at the End of the Revelation: The Bride that is a Body that is a Temple that is a non-stop Party — the New Jerusalem Coming Down.
- It's what Paul refers to as the “Plan for the fullness of time...to unite [*anakephalaiosasthai*: bring together under one head] all things in Christ Jesus.”
- It's Heaven; it's what we all most deeply desire. It's the Kingdom that was at hand in the field and on the shore of the sea that day 2,000 years ago.

And how do we get there? In other words, “Philipp, Andrew, and Peter, how are we going to feed the sheep?” The devil asks, “How are you going to feed the sheep?” Jesus asks, “How are we going to feed the sheep?” ...and I’m pretty sure that Jesus has a twinkle in his eye, as He asks the question.

Well, if we read the sign, I think it points to at least four ideas:

Point #1: Give all that you’ve got. Phillip did the math and said, “It’s impossible; I got nothing.” Andrew said, “Well, we’ve got this boy.” I imagine that Andrew might’ve known this little boy, and maybe he encouraged the little boy. But the little boy must’ve said, “I’ve got five barley loaves and two fish.” He didn’t say, “I’ll give you 10% of my five barley loaves and two fish.”

The Religious Institution of the Old Testament appears to have run on a system of tithes and offerings that would’ve equaled something like 33.3% of a person’s income, plus a plethora of farm animals and produce. In the New Testament, Jesus refers to us as “stewards,” and stewards don’t own anything. And a church full of stewards doesn’t own anything, for everything belongs to God. So, we just take care of his stuff together.

So, give what you’ve got without thinking about what you get. For, if you give to get, you haven’t really given what you’ve got. I imagine this little boy just gave all he had simply because he liked Jesus — in other words, it wasn’t a business investment; it was worship. So, give what you’ve got; give all of it. But what do you give if you think you’ve got nothing. I’m guessing that Tim and Bruce and Jim all felt like they had nothing to give.

Point #2: When you’ve got nothing to give, give your “nothing.” I suspect that this is what Philipp was not prepared to give: “his nothing.” He thought his nothing was a something that was just too much of an obstacle for Jesus. Ironically, when we have nothing to give, we can finally see that everything has been given, including our desire to give everything and our “nothing.”^v

At least Andrew came along and said, “Well, here’s nothing. It’s all we’ve got, but here it is: Nothing – just five loaves and two little fish.” It’s easier to share your something than your nothing, your strength than your weakness, your wealth than your poverty. With wealth, you often get a plaque — but this was shared poverty.

John points out that the fish were *opsarion* – little fish, like pickled sardines — and the loaves were barley loaves. Barley was the food of the poor. The Mishnah referred to barley bread as “the food of the beasts.” John is going out of his way to point out that this little boy’s lunch was poverty. Jesus produces this abundance from shared poverty.

Have you ever been to a party where everyone displays their wealth? You have, haven’t you? And it was hell. Ever been to a party where everyone admits that they’re poor?

Soren Kierkegaard once wrote:

Last night, I went to a party. Everyone admired my wit and sophistication. All agreed that I was most entertaining. And I returned to my apartment, closed the door, held a gun in my hands, and thought about blowing my brains out.

A party like that is death. But shared poverty is a banquet of grace.

Some years ago, a survey was conducted of elderly citizens in London. They were asked to name the happiest time of their life. Sixty percent answered, “the Blitz.” At one time during WWII, Nazi planes dropped tons of explosives on London every night. So, Londoners would huddle together in bomb shelters as they listened to the sound of all their earthly possessions being burned away by the fire from above: “The happiest period of their lives.” — The Blitz.

Before we moved back to Colorado, we lived in a house on the side of the church where I worked. We had one little bathroom. There were five of us at the time, two of whom were just learning to use the toilet. In our new house in Colorado, we would soon have three toilets and five sinks. But at that time: one toilet and one sink, in one tiny room. I distinctly remember one particular morning...

As usual, I was sitting on the throne, John on one knee, Elizabeth on the other. We were reading *Where’s Waldo?* as Susan put on her makeup at the sink, and Becky roamed the linoleum looking for things to put in her mouth. Suddenly, it hit me: “I’m really gonna’ miss this place.”
The Abundance of Shared Poverty.

- That’s what an AA meeting is: The Abundance of Shared Poverty.
- That’s what a Real Church is: The Abundance of Shared Poverty.

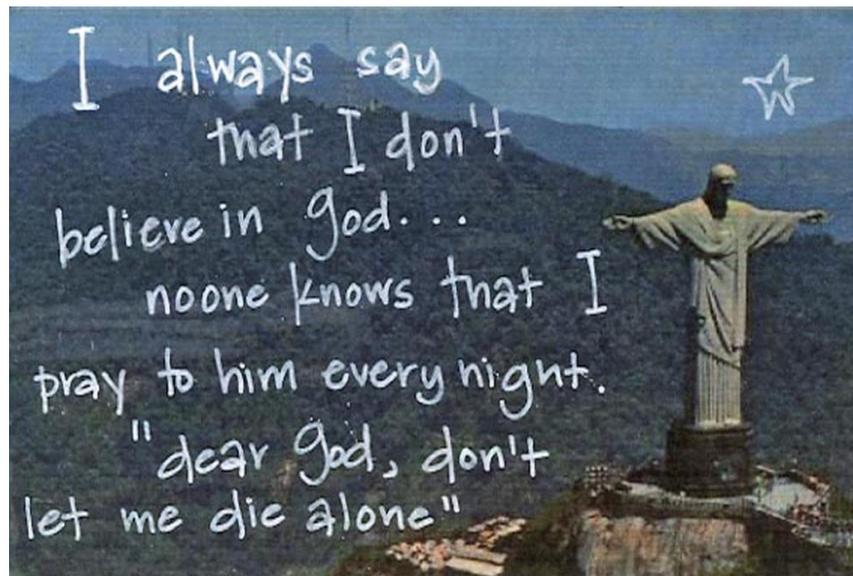
That’s what suicide is not. Suicide is poverty that’s not shared... often just a moment of poverty un-surrendered. Ironically, it’s refusing to die by seizing control of your own death — refusing to die to yourself — yourself, who is already dead. John just told us that “the believing, the trusting, have already passed from death into life.” Faith is the death of death, which is life. That is, surrendered death, which is the ultimate surrendered poverty, is Eternal Life... and the beginning of a feast that never ends, for it is the End.

As the new youth pastor in Danville, California, I led a small group of high school boys in a Bible study every week. It was brutal. It was death. I shared every talent, every gift, every brilliant insight and probing question, and still, they would only talk about the pronunciation of Titus... or “tit-us.” Until one evening, when out of the blue, Brian (the quiet kid, who I thought was never listening) said, “Sometimes... I feel like killing myself.”

It was the greatest gift that he could’ve given: honesty. And he gave it. I mean, he didn’t give it in order to force answers out of us; he didn’t expect us to fix it. He just gave it. And soon, everyone was giving it: their poverty. And we all came to life — as if the blood of Jesus flowed out of those boys and into Brian and out of Brian, and back into all of us — and we became a body! We became...The Abundance of Shared Poverty.

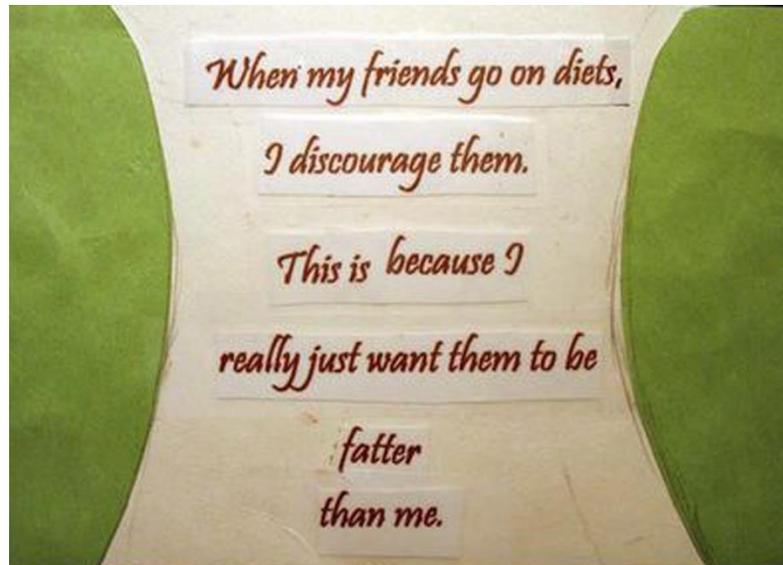
In 2004, this fellow named Frank Warren invited strangers to “artistically share their deepest secret,” put it on a postcard, and mail it anonymously to him for an art project. He’s received over a million postcards so far. Now you can do this electronically at Postsecret.com, the largest advertisement-free blog in the world, with 878,886,093 visitors by last Thursday. Most of the secrets are shared poverty; “confessions” is the Biblical term. Sin is acting out of a poverty of faith, for whatever does not proceed from faith is sin, wrote Paul. But Confession is shared poverty; it’s acknowledging that you need “a Helper.”

It makes sense that people are desperate to share these secrets, for when we hide our secrets, they eat at our souls and empower the evil one. But sharing them sparks a wild and wonderful hope that maybe... maybe we’ll be loved in the place of our deepest shame by a Helper made fit for us.

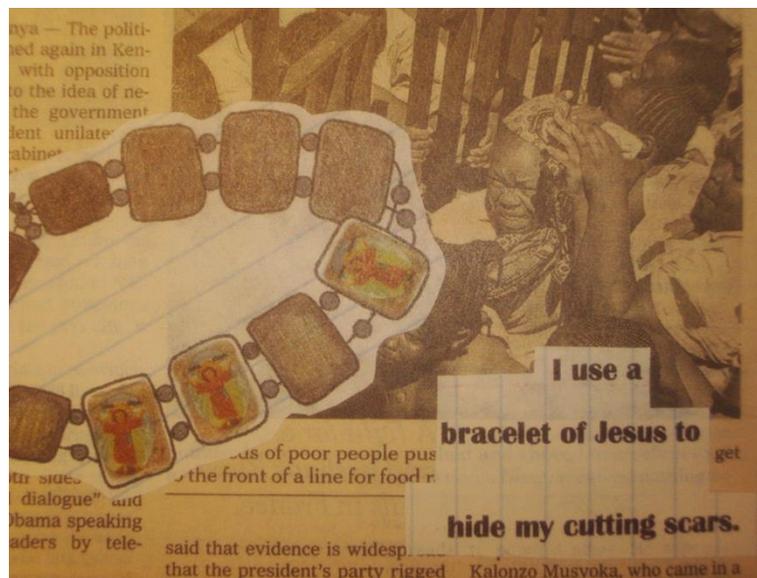


Here are a few post secrets:

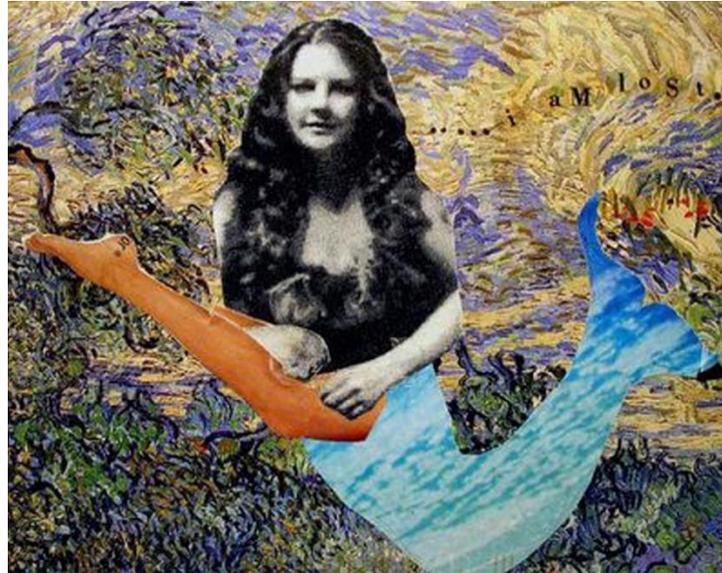
“I always say that I don’t believe in God . . . no one knows that I pray to him every night, ‘Dear God, don’t let me die alone.’”



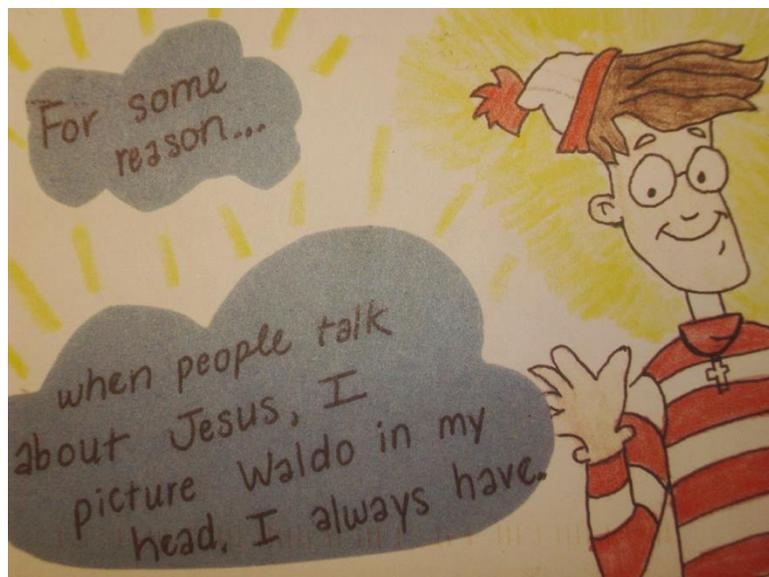
This is honest: "When my friends go on diets, I discourage them. This is because I really just want them to be fatter than me."



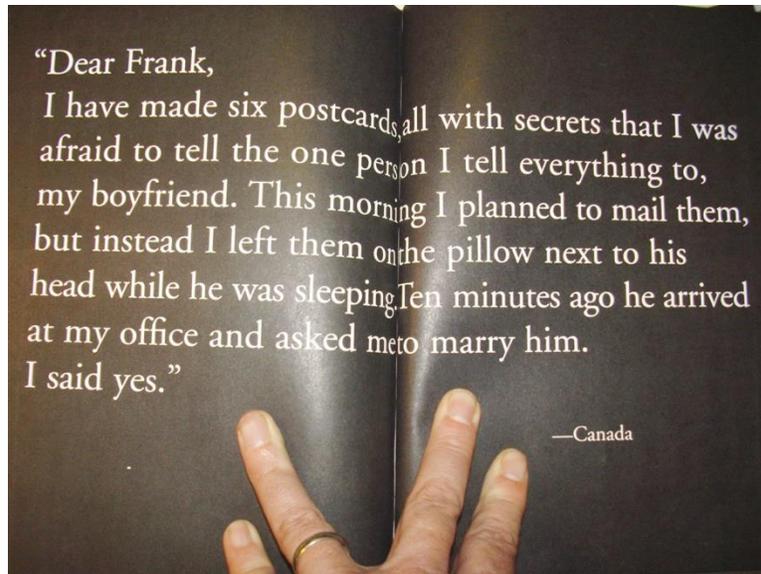
How about this one: "I use a bracelet of Jesus to hide my cutting scars."



And this... you can find it written up in the corner: “. . . I am lost.”



I love this: “For some reason when people talk about Jesus, I picture Waldo...”



This is actually a letter sent to Frank:

Dear Frank,
I have made six postcards all with secrets that I was afraid to tell the one person I tell everything to, my boyfriend. This morning, I planned to mail them, but instead, I left them on one pillow next to his head, while he was sleeping. Ten minutes ago, he arrived at my office and asked me to marry him. I said yes.

This truth is a bit of a shock for a terrified little soul, but even though Jesus hates sin, He finds confessed sin profoundly attractive. He finds our surrendered shame to be profoundly sexy. All sin is a lack of faith, but with Grace, Jesus creates faith in our place of shame — He is the Bridegroom, and we are His bride. Think about it. Take biology; life itself is The Abundance of Shared Poverty

“Blessed are the poor in Spirit, for of them is the kingdom of heaven,” said Jesus.^{vi} Heaven is literally constructed with the supreme abundance of shared poverty. “I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses that the power of Christ would rest on me,” wrote Paul. And he listed those weaknesses, including “His daily anxiety for all the churches.” That’s sin according to Paul. Paul is confessing his sin; He’s listened to the accuser at 3 a.m.: “How are you — Saul of Tarsus, Chief of Sinners — going to feed His sheep?” He’s confessing his weakness to us, that the power of Christ would rest on him.



In Tim's suicide note he wrote, "It is my own wretched weakness of which I feel most ashamed." At the General Assembly that year, Tim told my friend Johny, "I've never felt weaker in all my life." And Johny said, "Why don't you go to the elders?" Tim replied, "I've seen what they do to the weak – they'll crucify me." Maybe so and maybe not, but crucifixion isn't the End; it's actually just the beginning — actually the Beginning of The Great Banquet. But perhaps you really shouldn't share your poverty or confess your sins to just anyone; I suppose that's what it means to cast your pearls before swine. And that's Point Number 3.

Point #3: When you've got nothing to give, give your nothing (your poverty) to Jesus. If that little boy had just given his fish and five loaves to the five thousand, not because he wanted to but because he had to, there would be no banquet. You can't just mail it in; you need to give it to Jesus. A mere person cannot give you the food that you need — and if you think that they can, you will manipulate them, abuse them, and bleed them dry. "Man shall not live by bread alone," said the Word of God, "but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." A mere person cannot help you, but Christ in your neighbor can. It's not them, but it is the Word of God in them that will feed you. For those who are confident in themselves, that Word is buried deep and dormant behind a curtain in the temple of their dead soul — don't cast your pearls before them, they won't recognize them; they'll trample them under their feet. But for those who have been humbled and so have confessed their own weakness, that Word is not so deeply buried, and may have become a fountain, and so they may just speak that Word to you. To give your poverty to Jesus is to confess weakness to someone who relies upon Grace. Your confessed sin draws Christ up and out of your neighbor, and their surrendered poverty draws Christ up and out of you.

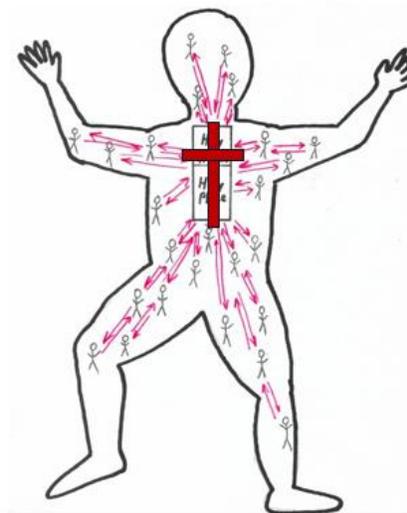
You just felt it, didn't you? While we were reading some of those post-secret cards? Didn't you just want to find those people, hug those people, and speak a word to them?

- "If you're lost, let's be lost together — and now look, we've both been found!"
- "If you're alone, let's be alone together — and now neither of us is alone!"
- "If you're sad, let's be sad together — and now we meet the man of sorrows, whose very presence turns sorrow into joy"

See? That's not just you. That's faith, hope, and love in you; that's Mercy in you. And now you're not just feasting on bread but on the substance of God, which is welling up in you like a fountain.



I remember Bruce McBogg hugging crazy old bag ladies at the bus stop and laughing with winos in the park. It was beautiful. I think he spoke from decades of pain and his own poverty of spirit. The love that he bled and that they returned, was a banquet of grace. But I also remember Bruce speaking to me about time management courses and business seminars that he had developed and hoped to offer to leaders. I think he saw me as a success, and with me, he wanted to share his "strength." But that strength was weak, and his weakness was so incredibly strong. Bruce's own strength could feed no one, but with Bruce's poverty, Jesus fed thousands. And He still is. Bruce was and always will be, Christ's Body Ministries. That's Point #4: Jesus is The Abundance of Shared Poverty.



The Last (eschatos) Thing
The 7th Sign that is the Substance

"Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up."

Point #4: The seventh sign that is the substance, the temple rebuilt in three days, the New Jerusalem coming down, the Bride of Christ — that is the Body of Christ. A body is an abundance of shared poverty in which every member is joined to every other member at a point of weakness, creating strength. If a member has no weakness, it's not part of a body. And it's dead and dying even if it has been told that it's alive. And that's why Satan constantly tempts you to hide your weaknesses in fig leaves, fashion, and fear. But Jesus is the Truth in you; He is your honesty. When you share your five barley loaves and two fish, it's Righteousness in you, which is literally Christ in you. And when you share it with the last and least of these, you share Christ in you with Christ in them, and that shared weakness is Divine Strength. It's the Body of Christ rising from the dead.

We'll discover that, unlike all the other Gospels and Paul, John doesn't recount Christ's words of institution at the Last Supper. "This is my body broken for you. This is the covenant in my blood." It's not because John doesn't believe it happened, but because he believes that it's happening all the time. In the last half of this chapter, Jesus tells the crowd (when they've found Him once again), "I am the bread that comes down from heaven...I am the bread of life...and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh...Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood, I will raise him up on the last day." I'm sure that Tim fed on His flesh and drank His blood. I watched Bruce come forward, take the bread and drink the wine. I actually fed Jim with the body broken and blood shed, several times.

At the Last Supper in John 13:26, Jesus actually dips a piece of broken bread in a glass of wine and gives it to Judas, who takes it. And then, Satan enters Judas. "And it was night." Wow! I suspect that John is saying that Jesus is saying that even if "the last and least of these, my brothers, is going to hell, then I'm going with him." And just think: If the barely bread is Jesus somehow, then perhaps in some amazing way, Jesus was already in and with that little boy, as He is in and with every little child? Whatever the case, we do know that Jesus instructed the Twelve, including Judas, to pick up the broken pieces of bread, "that nothing would be lost." That word "lost" is the verb "*apollumi*," also translated perished or destroyed. "Not one of them has been lost except the son of lostness, that the Scripture may be fulfilled," says Jesus in John 17, and Jesus told us that He came "to seek and to save the lost."

People often ask me about suicide, and I try to say something like this: "It won't work. You can't crucify yourself with yourself. You can't kill yourself with yourself. And it sounds to me like you're already dead, lost, and alone in Hell. But it can get worse. How much better to find someone else that feels alone so you would feel alone together — someone else that's lost, so you could be found together; someone else that's sad, so you could feel sad together. For if you did, your sorrow might turn into joy, and you might find yourself in the Kingdom of Heaven that is always at hand. Suicide won't work, but just because it won't work, that doesn't mean that Jesus won't work. In fact, He descends into Hades and gathers every fragment of bread, for the broken bread is his very own broken body." Jesus is literally The Abundance of Shared Poverty; He is the Resurrection and the Life.



At Jim’s funeral, I asked the question, “How do I know that in 10 years, I won’t do just what Jim did?” And I answered, “I don’t know. But I’m not saved by what I know; I’m saved by the one who knows me. So, even if I make my bed in Sheol (in Hades, in Hell) like David, even there, His right hand will hold me and then redeem me from the pit.^{vii}”



And so, I fully expect to be hanging out with Jim, Tim, and Bruce at the Great Banquet where we’ll forever feed each other with Body broken and Blood shed. But you and I don’t have to wait until that day. You know, Jesus really did say to Peter, “Feed My Sheep.” But do you remember when and where He said it? (John did: Chapter 21.)

- He said it on the shore of the Sea, after He’d been raised from the dead and Peter had been sifted like wheat, by Satan.
- He said it when Peter knew that he had just denied his Lord three times.
- He said it right after Peter had literally been fishing naked all night long and had caught nothing... “Now, Peter, feed my sheep.”
- He said it when Peter knew that he had nothing to give, and so Jesus gave everything through Peter... on this Rock, this Peter, He builds his church.

He says it to us when we see that we took his life on the tree, which is when and where he gives his life to the world, and gives it even through us. That’s when He says it to us, “Now, feed my sheep.” So:

Communion

On the night that He was betrayed by all of us, He took the bread and broke it, saying, “This is my body broken for you.” And He took the cup saying, “This is the covenant in my blood, poured out for the forgiveness of sins. Drink of it, all of you, and do it in remembrance of me.”

Just this morning, I’d like to do things just a little differently. I want us to feed each other. So, for the first person that comes forward, I will feed you. Then I want you to take a piece of bread, dip it in the cup, and feed the person behind you. [We’ll only use juice this morning; so, no worries about wine.] And then, the last person in the line will feed me. If that concerns you for health reasons, we’ll also leave a plate on the edge of the stage, and you can take communion that way.

This is the feast of Passover, and Jesus is the offering. It turns into the feast of Pentecost, which is like the broken bread in the five thousand — the *pentakischilio*, the Church. And that turns into the Feast of Tabernacles, which is the feast of ingathering when all the harvest, all the fragments of bread, all the lost, are gathered in. Jesus is saving the world, and he’s inviting you to help by testifying to him.

“Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me, and you.” That’s The Abundance of Shared Poverty. In the 1930s, Thornton Wilder wrote a wonderful little play titled *The Angel That Troubled the Waters*. It’s about the Pool of Bethesda in John 5, which we’ve been studying for the past three messages. In the play, a depressed physician goes to the pool hoping to be healed. But when he goes to step into the pool, the angel that troubled the water stops him and says, “No, the healing is not intended for you, step back.” You’ll remember that we were asking, “Why didn’t Jesus heal everyone at the pool that day?” This is what the angel tells the depressed physician in Thornton Wilder’s Play.

Without your wounds, where would your power be? Tell me, doctor, without your wounds, where would your power be? It is your melancholy that makes your low voice tremble into the hearts of men and women. The very angels themselves cannot persuade the wretched and blundering children of this earth as can one human being broken on the wheels of living. In love's service, only wounded soldiers can serve. Doctor, step back. ~Thornton Wilder

In the play, the invalid who is healed then begs the doctor to come speak to his son, for his son will only listen to the doctor who also knows his pain. You all have wounds, just as Jesus has wounds, and if they aren’t yet healed, perhaps they are meant to be shared with the people in this room. I think they may be the most precious thing that you could share with us. A Church is to be An Abundance of Shared Poverty. Sometimes this happens at lunch, sometimes at a Bible study, sometimes it happens at what we’ve called a life group or a small group. And if you’d like to be a part of one, John would like to help you set one up. But no matter what, believe the Gospel, and one day you will experience the Absolute Abundance of Shared Poverty; it’s also called, Heaven.^{viii} Amen.

Endnotes

ⁱ Satan tempts to evil, and yet at the same moment, God is tempting us and testing us to the good.

ⁱⁱ John uses *opsarion* (little broiled or pickled fish) instead of *ichthus* (just fish) as in the other gospels. Unlike the other gospels, he also points out that the bread is barley bread. John is pointing out that it was just any lunch that was shared; it was the lunch of a poor peasant boy or slave boy. This was shared poverty.

ⁱⁱⁱ Matthew 14:21

^{iv} ⁴ For it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins. ⁵ Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said,

*“Sacrifices and offerings thou hast not desired,
but a body hast thou prepared for me;*

⁶ in burnt offerings and sin offerings thou hast taken no pleasure.

*⁷ Then I said, ‘Lo, I have come to do thy will, O God,’
as it is written of me in the roll of the book.”*

– Hebrews 10:4-5 (Psalm 40:6-8)

This is an utterly fascinating text. For more on this see: <https://relentless-love.org/sermons/waiting-for-your-song/>

^v The more one needs God the more perfect he is. To need God is nothing to be ashamed of but is perfection itself. It is the saddest thing in the world if a human being goes through life without discovering that he needs God! For what is a human being after all? Is he just one more ornament in the vast array of creation? And what is his power? What is the highest he is able to will? Well, we do not want to defraud the highest of its price, but we cannot conceal the fact that the highest is realized only when a person is fully convinced that he himself is capable of nothing, nothing at all... We sometimes speak of learning to know God from events of past history. We open up the chronicles and read and read. Well, that may be fine, but how much time it takes, and how dubious the outcome frequently is! But someone who is conscious that he is capable of nothing has every day and every moment the precious opportunity to experience that God lives. If he does not experience it often enough, he knows very well why that is. It is because his understanding is faulty and he believes that he himself is, after all, capable of something. - Kierkegaard, *Provocations* (Farmington, PA: The Plough Publishing House, 1999), p. 32

^{vi} This is a literal translation of Matthew 5:3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for of them is the Kingdom of Heaven.”

^{vii} Psalm 139:8-10, Psalm 40:2

^{viii} 3/15/03 - Lookout Mountain Community Church

Tonight Peter Hiatt was preaching from Matthew 6 in a continuation of last week's sermon...

Through much of the sermon I got in the way and so was unable to see anything. At the beginning of the evening God took a sword and cut my chest open and asked me for my heart. Near the end of the sermon, He had to do it again because I was still getting in the way. Once He got me out of the way so I could see, He said "come up here with me and I will show you". He was on the cross and so He crucified me on the cross with Him. As I looked out over the room, I saw many different people doing many different things. I saw people praying, worshipping, crying, scared, anxious, children running around... Next, I started seeing a lot of suffering. I saw people with cancer, enduring horrible abuse, involved in ritualistic sacrifice. I also saw a person executed while on their knees, face and hands uplifted as their body was riddled with bullets. I saw people die in the German concentration camps, and I saw Peter (from the Bible) get stoned. At that point the vision just ended, and I told God, "this is a message of hope, that can't be it. There must be more." He told me to be patient and to come up a little bit higher and then to look closer. When I did, I saw that all of this was happening all at once within the walls of the New Jerusalem, the gleaming white walls with flags flying in the wind. "This is heaven." He said, "This is what the New Jerusalem is made of." - Dale Eben