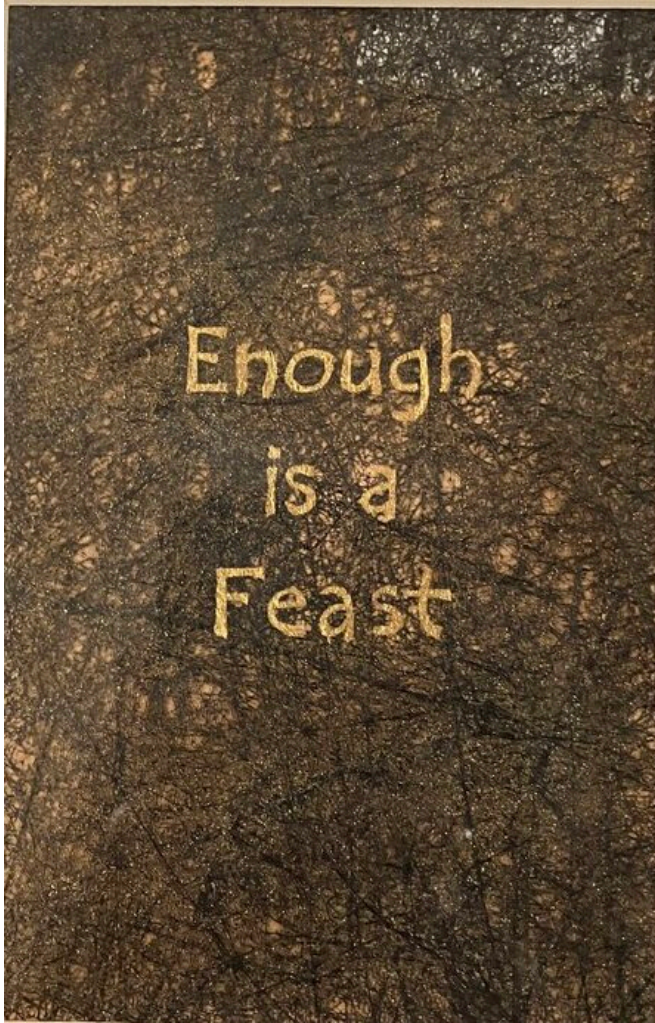


Being Enough



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Second Sunday in Lent

Our theme for this season of Lent is “Enough Is a Feast.” As I’ve been thinking about enoughness, I notice the questions that continually run through my mind. Am I drinking enough water? Eating enough vegetables? Getting enough sleep? Am I doing enough? When does doing enough cross over doing into too much?

In a democratic society, how much democracy is enough? Does a shrinking democracy reach a point of being not enough, and how would we know when that happens?

From Psalm 65:

You answer us with awesome and righteous deeds,

God our Savior,

the hope of all the ends of the earth

and of the farthest seas,

6

who formed the mountains by your power,

having armed yourself with strength,

7

who stilled the roaring of the seas,

the roaring of their waves,

and the turmoil of the nations.

8

The whole earth is filled with awe at your wonders;

where morning dawns, where evening fades,

you call forth songs of joy.

Amen.

In our reading from Exodus, everyone has just enough bread and quail to eat. Those who gather more find that they have

nothing left over; those who gather less are satisfied. In the gospel story of Jesus feeding five thousand people, everyone eats their fill and there are twelve baskets of leftovers.

The surface message of these stories is that God provides. If we just have faith, God will give us what we need and even leftovers. It begins to sound a little like the prosperity gospel, the belief that physical well-being and financial wealth are evidence of divine grace or favor. But is there a deeper message?

When I'm feeling frustrated or unsettled – that is, when things seem not enough – a question I like to ask myself is, "What do you actually need right now?"

Just about every day I read a meme or a blog post that tells me, "You are enough, just as you are. You don't have to strive to be any more or better." And I agree, "Yes! I am enough." But I don't really believe it, and so I keep striving. When have I done enough – in a day, for another person, in my lifetime?

What does it mean to say that I am enough, you are enough? I find a clue in a reflection from the book *Courage to Change: One Day at a Time in Al-Anon*. It says, "In order to survive in the contradictory and explosive world of alcoholism, many of us learned to ignore our feelings. We lost touch with ourselves without even knowing it. ... In my fear and confusion, I walked away from the little child in me who lived simply, who cried when the cat died and then let it go, who could appreciate a sunset and not want to own it, and who lived one day at a time. ... There is an innocence within me that already knows how to trust my Higher Power, to cherish life while holding it lightly, to live fully and simply in the present moment. I will allow that part of myself to come forward and nourish me as I continue on this journey."

I think we can meet the challenge of not-enoughness with

grace. We are doing the best we can.

We live in the midst of conflict. There is more than enough discord and hostility, and more conflict than we had grown accustomed to over the past decade or so. What's happening now in the world is severe and painful and harmful. And yet, what's happening also is that we are finding our courage and contributing our ability to protect what needs to be protected.

All of the ways in which families are being attacked, all of the ways in which we are left to feel insecure, to all of this we rise up and go about providing nourishment and nurturing and protection to ensure that the most vulnerable of people and all life forms get to grow into what they need to be.

Some of us are aware that we have more than enough. We're not billionaires – we're nowhere near that outrageous level of wealth. But we can pretty much live the lives we choose. We can afford to buy the food we want, and we have easy access to it. Same with our clothing and accessories. We have clean water and fairly clean air, comfortable homes, reliable transportation. We have leisure time and we can travel if we want to. And we like having these privileges; we might even believe that we've earned at least some of them.

I'm reading Robin Wall Kimmerer's latest book, *The Serviceberry*. Its subtitle is *Abundance and Reciprocity in the Natural World*. The dictionary defines reciprocity as "mutual dependence, action, or influence." Another way to say it is "shared in common."

I also read an essay by Toi Smith,* whose work – and I'm quoting her website – is with people and organizations that "are creating lives that are born from consciousness, awareness, possibility, relationship, and a deep belief in not perpetuating norms that are harmful and hurtful."

In the essay, Smith writes about attending a book talk by

Robin Wall Kimmerer. We've heard of her and her work from a number of Seekers, including the members of our Earth and Spirit Mission Group. She is a Native American author, scientist, and professor, whose work is at the intersection of botany, Indigenous knowledge, and environmental ethics. An enrolled member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation, she serves as a Professor of Environmental Biology at the State University of New York (SUNY) College of Environmental Science and Forestry.

Her published books include *Braiding Sweetgrass*, which many of us read during the pandemic, then *Gathering Moss*, and her latest, *The Serviceberry*. Through these books Wall Kimmerer invites us to rethink our relationship with the Earth – to think not as consumers but as caretakers, and she offers a vision grounded in reciprocity, respect, and reverence for all living beings.

That sounds really good to me, and it probably sounds good to you, too. But what I appreciate most about Toi Smith's essay is that she gives words to a question that floats around in the misty back of my mind.

Smith is an enthusiastic fan of Wall Kimmerer. She writes, "I was beyond excited to see and hear Robin in person. Excited to soak in her wisdom, especially given the political climate we're navigating. Excited to hear what she's working on, where her focus is amidst so much chaos. Honestly, just excited to be in her presence."

But Smith was a little troubled by the setting. It was Boulder, Colorado. Smith writes, "Boulder is beautiful, surrounded by the Rockies, with open spaces and all the nature that would make sense for someone like Robin to visit. But Boulder's demographics always make me pause. It's a predominantly white, affluent city, often seen as progressive on the surface but steeped in the kind of liberalism that prides itself on 'doing good' while often failing to confront

deeper systems of power, privilege, and exclusion.”

In other words, Boulder is a city that, like many of us citizens, has more than enough.

Smith continues, “There I was, one of maybe five Black people, learning from an Indigenous woman elder, in a sold-out venue packed with predominantly white people. The setting was beautiful, the energy palpable, but the dynamics were painfully familiar.”

Smith describes the talk. She says that Wall Kimmerer “offered truth after truth, each one layered with wisdom, care, and an invitation to rethink everything.

“But as the evening unfolded, a question kept rising in me: *And now what?*”

That is the question that keeps coming up for me, too, no matter how hard I try to push it away. I confess, that question stopped me less than halfway through *Braiding Sweetgrass*, and I still haven’t finished the book. And now I’m reacting in the same way to *The Serviceberry*. I don’t lose interest in the books, but I lose courage, as I think, “Oh, this is so true,” and I feel powerless to do anything about it.

Toi Smith raises the issue honestly and compassionately. She writes, “The question ‘*And now what?*’ lingers...not as a judgment, but as an open door. What would it look like to carry Robin’s words beyond that auditorium? To sit with the discomfort they might stir? To turn inspiration into action?

“What would it mean to see wealth, land, and opportunity not as personal entitlements but as collective resources that have been unevenly distributed by design? To ask not ‘*What can I spare?*’ but ‘*What is truly owed?*’

“What shifts when you unearth the systems you benefit from –

white supremacy, capitalism, ableism, patriarchy – and instead of stopping at awareness, you ask, *‘What is required of me in this relationship?’* ”

What do I have access to that can be shared with others?

It’s not just about what I do with money. It’s also about what I do with my time and any power or voice I might use. *And now what?* As I search and stumble and try out answers, Smith graciously assures me that “this isn’t about doing it perfectly. It’s about doing it honestly. About being willing to make mistakes, be called in, and keep moving forward anyway.”

Last Sunday, during our Reflection time following the sermon, Sallie made a comment about being “not just allies from a comfortable distance, but supporters” of those who are oppressed and endangered.

I want add a word for the artists among us – and that means each one of us, because we all are creators, whether we work with paints or people, fabrics or food, songs or sand on the beach, or any of thousands of artistic media. We can be tempted, as I certainly am, to think, “My art doesn’t count – it’s not a real contribution.”

The Black American writer, educator, and political activist Toni Cade Bambara put it this way, “As a culture worker who belongs to an oppressed people my job is to make revolution irresistible.”

Yesterday Nadia Bolz-Weber, a Lutheran pastor and public theologian, posted on her Substack some answers she received to a question she asked her subscribers. This is how she introduced it:

“Yesterday on my walk I saw tiny new buds on this tree I’ve passed each day of winter, and below it, as if they were a team, the green of new tulips. And I thought, ‘Spring is still

happening.’ Then I thought, ‘Gladness is still happening. ... and ‘Cookies are still happening.’

“And then I thought I’d start this thread so you can add to my list.

“Name what, even though so much is being taken away, is still happening.”

These are just a few of the answers she received:

Theater is still happening.

Photography is still happening.

Loving pets are still happening.

Sobriety is still happening.

Prayer is still happening.

And it goes on and on ...

What would you add to the list? My invitation to you is this: that, during the Reflection time, if you want to, come here to the podium or raise your hand in the Zoom room, and name one good thing that you’ve noticed is still happening.

Here’s mine. This church, this community of Seekers, all of us so different as individuals yet committed to loving and working alongside each other, is still happening.

Each of us is called to play our part, even now, especially now. Do not lose heart. Building a world of justice and healing will take all of us. You are needed, your voice is needed, your heart is needed. I’m so grateful to be alongside you all in this life’s work.

Amen.

▪ Toi Smith, “Beyond the Feel-Good Moment”

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