The Motivation of Abundance– **Luke 21:1-4**
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Do you feel like this Sunday is different from last Sunday? We're all a week older than last week, with different things on our minds this week compared to last. Every Sunday is different than the last.

But we all know that the world is much different in America today than it was last Sunday. An election has taken place since the last time we met, and whether we agree or disagree with the results, this week marks the beginning of something new. It's a new opportunity—a joyful new beginning for the country if our preferred party is in control of government, or a bleak new beginning for the country if our preferred party has lost power.

No matter your joy or your disappointment, though, we've now all been given an opportunity to take a break from the political divide and anger for a time. Whether we are celebrating or lamenting, we have a chance to focus on other things that might in fact be more beneficial to us than the election cycle that has dominated the country for a good while.

Politics never takes a break. I get that. The 2028 presidential contenders will soon be appearing like ants underneath the kitchen sink. But with this election over, we all have an opportunity to refocus on other things. And as I say after every election, no matter who wins, politicians never have the biggest impact on our lives. We have more say on the degree of meaning and joy we take from our human journeys than they do.

Mitch Albom, columnist with the Detroit Free Press, in a column years ago before a presidential election, previewed and lamented the aftermath. Toward the end, he wrote:

"The truth is, our future won't be determined by who we choose to lead us this week. It will be determined by how we act after we do. An American president, when he wakes up, [isn't an angel who] steps off a cloud. He is a representative, nothing more. What will he represent? What will *we* represent? Who will we be on Wednesday, Thursday, and beyond?"

In the aftermath of this past Tuesday's election, we should all be a people that is kinder, gentler, and filled with gratitude. And we should also be a people that understands that our ultimate well-being and blessing lie with the God who made us and provides for us every day.

Author Jon Gordon wrote,

"Individually, you can't control an election. But you can control what you do the day after tomorrow. You can: be happy, work hard, and love others. You can: make a difference by helping to heal someone, feeding the poor, and helping the needy. You can raise your children with great values and principles. You can love, serve, and care. [Government is] in control of running the country. But you and only you are in control of running your life."

This is what we do in grateful response to God's daily provision. We can work hard and love others. We can help heal someone, feed the poor, and help the needy. We can raise our kids and grandkids with values and principles. We can love, serve, and care. We are in control of all that.

The poor widow in our text from Luke, well, had not been totally in control of her life up to this point. But she was in control of her actions on this day.

Jesus had just finished rebuking the religious leaders for their hypocrisy and abuse of power, specifically for how they devoured the estates of widows, the group of people this widow was very much a part of; and now Jesus witnessed a widow surrendering her entire estate to the very institution that was supposed to protect her.

Why did she do it? After all that had happened to her to erase the resources she had, why did she give what she had left to the temple treasury? The scribes had failed her. The temple had failed her. The very building itself, Jesus would eventually say, because of how it had been corrupted, would need to be torn down.

And yet, there she was, with her two small copper coins, worth a penny, placing them into the treasury.

Jesus made this observation after she had finished: "This poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had."

Jesus was right; the woman was poor. But maybe he wasn't right in this sense: maybe she didn't contribute out of her poverty; maybe she gave all she had out of her own personal sense of abundance. She felt abundance in her heart—she felt blessed despite all that had happened to her—and it enabled her to put into the treasury all she had.

A sense of abundance can be a force for tremendous good. And abundance can be realized whether we have a million dollars or ten.

The woman's sense of abundance (over obligation and a sense of duty, I'll maintain), allowed her to be generous.

Despite all the bad in the world, we shouldn't overlook the abundance in our lives. As fearful as we seem to act in the face of what lies ahead, we shouldn't discount the blessings we have: meals to eat and safe places to sleep, good schools, great medical care, family and friends who love us, and, most of all, a God who loves us mightily. Our blessings overflow. We should be thankful.

Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann wrote extensively on abundance: "We who are now the richest nation are today's main coveters," he says. "We never feel that we have enough; we have to have more and more, and this insatiable desire destroys us. Whether we are liberal or conservative Christians, we must confess that the central problem in our lives is that we are torn apart by the conflict between our attraction to the good news of God's abundance and the power of our belief in scarcity—a belief that makes us greedy, mean, and un-neighborly.

The writer Erma Bombeck told the story of a grandmother who "took her grandson to the beach one day, complete with bucket, shovel and sun hat that he was wearing. The grandmother dozed off and as she slept, a large wave dragged the child out to sea. The grandmother awoke and was devastated. She fell to the ground on her knees and prayed, 'God, if you save my grandchild, I promise I'll make it up to you. I'll join whatever club you want me to. I'll volunteer at the hospital, give to the poor and do anything that makes you happy.'

"Suddenly, a huge wave tossed her grandson on the beach at her feet. She noticed color in his cheeks and his eyes were bright. He was alive. As she stood up, however, she seemed to be upset.

She put her hands on her hips, looked skyward, and said sharply, 'He had a hat, you know.'"

Seems like we're never satisfied. Always something missing. Always a scarcity of something.

Our abundance extends beyond our scarcity, though: like the uncertainty of tomorrow. It exists beyond our belief of whether we think, for example, government is doing too much or not doing enough. It extends beyond our belief of whether we should pay more or less taxes. It extends beyond whether we think human rights or equality are in danger or that God's church is in decline. Our abundance extends beyond all our doubt and worry.

Our abundance remains overwhelming for one simple factor: God in Jesus Christ loves us deeply and always will.

Because of this and our gratitude for it, we aim for what Peter exhorts in his first letter: Above all, love each other deeply. Offer hospitality to each other. Serve others as faithful stewards of God's grace.

William Sloan Coffin was quoted as saying, "If Christ is God's love in person on earth, churches ought to be God's love in an organization on earth. If love is what it's all about, where are we going to celebrate this love unless in community with loving people? Essentially what a church ought to be is a community of loving people who believe that our lives consist of an abundance of love - not of an abundance of possessions."

Thanks for being faithful stewards out of your own abundance of love and gratitude—stewards of this church and beyond.