

Enough

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[0 : 00] If you're new, and this is one of your first times at the table watching your presence, you might be the sort of person who, like, maybe you're deconstructing, maybe you're kind of dismantling some of the baggage or trauma from prior church experiences.

And you went online, you searched, I've heard all sorts of search terms for the table, hipster church, that's come up. Progressive church, affirming church, multi-ethnic church.

People find the table in a variety of different ways. But so many of the stories all kind of have a similar vibe to them. Either I grew up in the church or sort of religion adjacent, and I was looking for a group of people who were, you know, not going to kick me out because of who I loved or the color of my skin or the fact that I didn't read my Bible 14 times a week or things like that.

And you might be the sort of person who you came from an environment where money, giving, tithing, was, like, really shame-inducing. And so somebody would come up on a platform a lot like this, dress a lot like me, with a microphone a lot like this, and say, you must give in order for God to bless you or in order for God to do God's work in the church.

And if you don't, then you've got something wrong with your finances, you've got something wrong with your relationship with God. And so when I tell you that we're going to spend the next few weeks talking about money, communal economics, and generosity, I would perfectly understand if your heart rate went up and you'd be like, damn it, I thought I found a good church and I didn't.

[1 : 37] Okay? I'd perfectly understand you. Now, let me tell you, there is a version of that on this side of the proverbial pulpit. Okay? Talking about money in the church is, at least for me, also an anxiety-inducing thing as a preacher, pastor, Bible communicator, whatever it is I am.

Because I've also sat on that side of the pew, and I've also been pressured by others to do the pressuring. And so we feel like it's worth pushing through that anxiety before you slam, close your laptop lid, or walk out of the room.

Because if we're not going to be the ones to talk about our economics and our generosity, then somebody else will on our behalf. And we'll get shaped into a culture and a system and an environment which will turn us into money-making machines rather than the human beings that God intended us to be.

Now, let me tell you a couple of my own stories. We're kicking off a series. Pastor Tanetta and I, we're going to co-preach tonight. So I'm going to do some introductions, some storytelling. Tanetta will lead us in some group discussion and a little reflection on Scripture.

But we're just getting started. All right? So for my own part, my wife Emily and I, we went to the same church in college. And this church had been around for maybe a decade or so.

[3 : 00] And it was kind of on the outskirts of Mishawaka, Indiana. And it was planted kind of in cornfields. Yes, it's Indiana. But those cornfields were being turned into subdivisions, kind of suburban neighborhoods.

And as the neighborhoods grew, the church did not. Actually kind of shrank over time. And it was about 50 to 70 people on a Sunday. So the pastor at the time had this kind of vision from God. That's the way that he put it. That in order for us to reach out to the families all around us that were moving into all of these things that used to be cornfields, the way that we were going to reach these folks was going to build a gymnasium.

So church of 50 to 70 had a well-appointed building, a new building, but it needed to build this gymnasium in order to get all the families to come to church. And so we heard sermon series after sermon series and story after story about why God had given this pastor a vision of building a gymnasium.

Now, quick aside, I was not a massive fan of this pastor already. This was the pastor who, when I became a biblical studies and Christian ministry major, he took me out to eat to tell me, Anthony, I'm pretty sure that's not the right job for you, which is rough.

[4 : 17] So me and him, you know, we had some issues. But what got interesting as this building campaign for the church went on was that you'd have people come up on the platform to give testimony, testimony about how God had led them to sell their car and donate it to the church or to empty out their retirement account and give it to the church that this gymnasium could be built.

So the gymnasium is built, and the pastor has burnt out and leaves ministry, and the church closes within six months. And so people had given their savings, had heard this vision from God, and then the church closes its doors.

So when I tell you that, like, hmm, talking about generosity in the church gives me, like, bad feelings, I'm not lying. I'm not lying to you. The next church that we served at, where I served at in Iowa, had a pastor who was there before my time and was also manipulative with money, where, you know, he'd get up on a Sunday behind a pulpit and say things like, you know, as your pastor, you know, I shouldn't really be paying full price for that car at the car dealership, right? Shouldn't really be paying full price at the chiropractor. I mean, I'm your pastor, I should, right? So it's just these really manipulative ways of talking about generosity and giving that line to somebody's pockets.

And it was gross. It was nasty, to be honest. The next pastor, who I did serve under, he just never talked about money. Because of the bad experience that the church had, then money was just never talked about.

[6 : 03] And the church always had financial issues and people kind of had this cultural expectation to keep up with the Joneses in our particular neighborhood in Iowa.

So all that to say, I'm not thrilled about any of this. And yet, we think it's necessary. I meet regularly as a premarital counselor with couples and families.

They're on the verge of getting married. And hardly anybody I've met has a plan for their money or has a plan for communal economics. In other words, how to be generous, how to think outside of our own selves, our own family units, how to build systems of equity when it comes to our finances. If we don't shape the way we use our resources, then our resources are going to go ahead and shape us. So Tanetta and I, we want to ground this series on, first of all, our own transparency about this.

We're going to do some storytelling from our own lives. And we also want to ground it in a sense of enough, which Pastor Tanetta will talk a little bit more about. But basically, answering, asking and answering the questions of what is enough?

[7 : 20] How do I live with the belief that whatever I have is enough? At least for today. In a little bit, when we do communion, we're actually going to pray the Our Father, the Lord's Prayer that says, Give us this day our daily bread.

And I've heard another preacher say, like, how many of us would be ticked off if God actually answered that prayer and stopped there? Just our daily bread, that's it. What a stingy God.

So we've got some things to think about. And I'll be honest with you, at some point, in a few weeks, yes, we will talk about the Table Church's finances. We'll talk about how to give.

But that's not really our goal, all right? So we've got to have some honesty about, we're a non-profit, there's salaries involved, or there's a building that we rent, there's stuff. But the goal is not just, hey, please give the church more money.

The broader goal has to do with, if we want to create a just and beautiful society, if we want to enact this kingdom that Jesus proclaimed, then we wouldn't be being honest if we said it had nothing to do with our money and our resources.

[8 : 26] So the first thing I want to do is kind of give a little bit of my money autobiography, my money story, just in the name of transparency and the fact that how I grew up, how we all grew up, our families of origins, it shapes and changes the way that we think about money and resources.

So for myself, I spent the first six years of my life growing up poor. The sort of poor where we had an apartment, but the apartment was filled with rats and cockroaches, the utilities would come off and on.

There was some drug deals going on outside the window. So my biological mom, who I lived with, and myself, you know, we would use a food pantry. There were certain smells of like kind of old

bread that they'd bring me right back to that place.

So I lived there for, you know, about six years. And, you know, you're not really, my biological mom's not teaching me anything money, but I'm picking up some things that it's scarce, that it's rare, that once you get some, you spend it immediately, lest somebody, you know, come collecting on a bill.

There's some things that you learn as a person without financial resources that even today are hard for me to shake. At the age of six, I ended up living in a car with my mom for a little bit of time and then ended up in the foster system.

[9 : 51] Eventually start living with biological family and aunt and uncle who were very much upper middle class where there was no more scarcity mindset, but we had everything we could possibly want.

Anybody remember clear invisible phones in the 90s? Yeah. We had some of those. We had MTV. We had a big sound system with like the five disc changer that had like no doubt in it, things like that.

Geriatric millennial, here I am. Nothing was a worry though. Private school, all of those things. And so I lived in that environment for about four years, say ages six to ten years old.

And it was like whiplash from like scarcity and critters on the floor to, you know, carpet and invisible phones and blow up couches and MTV. And so then I learned some other things about money that like, well, if you worked hard, if you did the right things, then money would just come flowing freely. And that taught me some lies about the belief of, you know, honor and dignity and who deserved money and who didn't. Then I didn't end up staying living with that family.

[10 : 59] I got put in the foster system once again and ended up with the family that would adopt me when I was in my young teens. And they were a slightly different story. I was the youngest of six siblings, five older siblings.

There was a single income in the house. And so it had to stretch a long ways. So it was kind of more middle, lower middle class. And my parents could pinch a penny until it bled.

But that also taught me some things about money. Kind of led to this sense of what I would call stinginess. A certain amount of like, well, we got to hoard as much as we can because we never know when another bad day is going to come.

The idea of debt and borrowing money, at least in my family, was shameful to the point where when I was in college, I bought like an HP laptop and I just kept moving it across 0% credit cards until I got married.

And then Emily and I got married and we had this finance conversation. She discovered about the, you know, couple hundred dollars of debt that I had, which doesn't sound like a lot now, but when we were substitute teaching and working odd jobs, it was a lot of money that I had hid the debt from because of the shame that it had induced and had been kind of passed on to me from my family.

[12 : 16] When Emily and I had our first child, Audrey, my parents came and visited for a while and they watched as, you know, a variety of people from our church would bring in meals to, you know, help support us after the birth of a child.

My parents were watching this and eventually kind of took me aside and said like, Anthony, I didn't know you were having financial struggles. I'm like, what do you mean? She's like, well, people, my parents were like, people are giving you meals.

That must mean, you know, you don't have enough money. Because in my parents' world, like generosity was something that you did for poor people. It wasn't just like an act of kindness.

The idea of simply giving a meal was this foreign concept. So all of this, which is very much my personality, I rebelled against as an adult. My dad is very content with Costco jeans.

I'm not. My jeans have like, you know, a dollar sign in three digits after it. I've got the newest iPhone in my pocket.

[13 : 17] Our household believes in name brand peanut butter. Quick poll. Here's Jif family. Jif. There we go. Oh, the Jif people almost seem embarrassed.

Jif's okay. It's all right. Peter Pan. That's right. Yeah. I did this mostly as an opportunity for Tanetta to.

Skippy? Anybody Skippy? Oh, lots of, ooh, fascinating. I'm intrigued by this. Okay. Anyway, I'm the kind of person, like, I'd rather have one really nice thing than five so-so things.

And that's just like a form of rebellion against how I grew up those last teenage years of my life. And sometimes I wonder if my pursuit of, like, good stuff prevents me from maybe having good experiences, maybe as many good experiences as I could have, or to still have student debt that's a little bit higher than maybe it could have been.

And I have to check my own motives as an Enneagram 3 who is obsessed about what you all think of me. Does that obsession prevent me from being more generous? Or even cause my generosity to come from ugly motives?

[14:30] Well, let me tell you about all the places that I give to. These are all ways in which money and how we talk about it, how it's been handed down to us, it shapes us and it forms us to be certain kinds of people.

And so then, how is a community of, theoretically, Jesus followers, theoretically, people who want to be known to be generous and kind and giving, how then do we have honest conversations about the ways money shapes us and we shape our money, the way that economics shape us and we shape our economics, about what we think is fair and what we think is just and what we think is not. These are all conversations I think we need to have because it's going to happen anyway. We're going to be shaped by it anyway. So we need to be honest about it with ourselves and with our neighbors and with our friends so that there's some level of accountability so that we can all be working towards some goal, some end together.

otherwise, the commercials and the economics and the systems will do all of that work on our behalf whether we want it to or not. I'm going to pass it to Pastor Tanetta.

All right. So what we're going to do now, we felt like this series, it was really important to start with vulnerability and storytelling and questions.

[15:43] So even when I reflect in a little bit, there'll be more questions than answers. But I want to give us a few minutes to talk to one another about some of this.

Now, when we do this, I'm going to encourage larger groups, so groups more of like five to six, so that if you don't want to share, you do not have to share. All right. I want to make sure that people feel safe.

If you want to share, jump in. There are going to be some questions here to think about. But I also would say another way to approach this, again, if some of this feels like, oh, I don't know if I can talk about this out loud, it's just like, what if you have been a part of church spaces, how is money talked about in those spaces?

So again, larger groups and five or six people and enter in as you choose to. Some people, the bathroom is that way if you need to do that.

All right. So just for a few minutes and then I'm just going to close us with a reflection full of questions and wonderings. So let's do that for a few minutes. Five or six people. All right. If you're, if you're open, if you're open, would you just be willing to pray with me?

[16:52] I just want to hold space for the vulnerability. So if you will, pray with me. Lord, you are the creator of this material world.

This world that we often so struggle to know how to steward well, to interact with in healthy ways and not to idolize. Lord, I just recognize in this moment that so many of us in the church have been deeply wounded by the simplicity, by simplistic stories around giving, by manipulative practice, by ideas of generosity that were deeply rooted in I have, you need, ideas of generosity that were deeply individualistic instead of communal.

Lord, so many of us in this room struggle with shame around how much we have, whether it's a lot or a little.

we struggle. And I just pray that as we move forward tonight and in this series that you would help us to consider what it means to have enough, to experience enough while always pushing forward for systems of equity and inclusion for all.

In Jesus' name, amen. All right, so in the next like six or seven minutes, all I want to do is close us out with a pretty brief reflection that I hope grounds the rest of this series.

[18:38] So there are literally going to be a lot of questions on the screen. I encourage you to, maybe we'll put those in the newsletter or go back and look at those in the recording because I really hope week by week for the next five weeks or so, they do shape your thinking about all of this and some of your prayer time.

So what we're going to do, I'm going to read Exodus. If you have a device, a Bible, or you can just feel free to listen as well, I'm going to read the story of manna in Exodus because it is deeply about what it means to have enough and to think about God's economy in terms of the world.

I'm going to just make a few observations, ask a few questions, and then we'll close out. So we're going to start actually in Exodus 15, verse 26.

It's the very end right before the manna story. So Exodus 15, verse 26. He said, If you will listen carefully to the voice of the Lord your God and do what is right in his sight and give heed to his commandments and keep all his statutes, I will not bring upon you any of the diseases that I brought upon the Egyptians, for I am the Lord who heals you.

Then they came to Elam, where there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees, and they camped there by the water. So the first thing I want to say before we even look at the manna story is I find it fascinating that before you get into this story that is about enough, God's economy, you get a few verses that contrast a sick society with a society that is leaning into God's healing.

[20 : 29] Egypt at the time was, I don't want to use the word industrial, but it was the closest you would have at the time to an industrial society in the late Bronze Age.

It was built on coercive labor. It was deeply administrative and about accumulating and amassing on the backs of certain people. Egypt, historians would say, is a society that invented kind of elite living, luxury living, and you can see that even in the art that comes out of Egypt.

You got to do Neurotomy 420. Egypt is called the iron furnace. So the Israelites are coming out of Egypt, coming out of the society that views what it means to have enough in a particular way, and that way is about accumulation and hoarding.

All right, let's go back to the story. I wanted to start there. And I'll read through the story, make a couple of, say a couple of things. All right, so this is 16.1. The whole congregation of the Israelites set out from Elam and came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elam and Sinai, on the 15th day of the second month after they had departed from the land of Egypt.

The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness.

The Israelites said to them, if only we had died by the hand of the Lord in Egypt when we sat by the pots of meat and ate our fill of bread.

[22 : 01] For you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger. Then the Lord said to Moses, I am going to rain bread from heaven for you.

And each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. In that way, I will test them whether they will follow my instruction or not. On the sixth day when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather on the other days.

So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites in the evening you shall know that it was the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt. In the morning you shall see the glory of the Lord. I'm going to skip down to verse 9.

Then Moses said to Aaron, say to the whole congregation of the Israelites, draw near to the Lord for he has heard your complaining. And as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the Israelites, they looked toward the wilderness and the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud.

The Lord spoke to Moses, I have heard the complaining of the Israelites. Say to them, at twilight you shall eat meat and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread. Then you shall know that I am the Lord your God. And in the evening quails came up and covered the camp and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp.

[23 : 11] When the layer of dew lifted there on the surface of the grass was a fine flaky substance, as fine as a frost on the ground. When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, what is it?

Which is literally manna. What is it? For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, it is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat. This is what the Lord has commanded, gather as much of it as each of you needs.

An omer per person according to the number of persons. The Israelites did so, some gathering more, some gathering less. But when they measured it with an omer, those who gathered much had nothing over and those who gathered little had no shortage.

They gathered as much as each of them needed. And then I'm going to skip down a little bit more to verse 22. On the sixth day, they gathered twice as much food, two omers apiece.

When all the leaders of the congregation came and told Moses, he said to them, this is what the Lord has commanded. Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest, a holy Sabbath to the Lord. Bake what you want to bake and boil what you want to boil.

[24 : 21] And all that is left over put aside to be kept until morning. So they put it aside until morning just as Moses commanded them. And then you get into this understanding and description of Sabbath.

So I'm going to leave it there hoping, hoping that you will, a long piece of scripture, that you will spend some time reflecting on it in the weeks to come. So a couple things I want to make note of here.

The first thing is just in terms of context. And I think it's important for us to consider that when the Israelites remember their experience in Israel, they remember sitting by flesh pots full of meat. And yet what they were eating was bread. It's as if they remember themselves as eating the meat. But they never ate the meat. They only ate the bread. So one of the things to consider when we talk about communal economics is when you consider kind of the economic mechanisms of our society, how are we a sick society, as I talked about first?

And then within this society, what is your guiding vision for a secure and happy economic life? And what parts of that vision rest on illusion?

[25 : 39] Because for the Israelites, what they remembered was actually an illusion. An illusion of the good life that never served them. And I think that's one of the things, I think as a woman who came from a family who had a sense of what the good life was, I also had to wrestle through, like, is that really what it is?

Is that really what I'm going for? So that's one thing to consider. And then a couple of other things. Note in this story that every family is to gather just enough.

There is the sense that in God's economy there is too much and too little. Something that we don't necessarily talk a lot about. We have a pretty high tolerance in our culture for wealth disparity and inequity and extreme luxury and extreme poverty.

But in this story, there isn't enough. And you can exceed below or above that. That's really important. So another thing to be considering as we move through this series is just, how do you relate to a theology of enough?

I know for some of us that might raise, like, ugh, I've never had enough. Why do we talk about things like abundance and scarcity? Like, there doesn't seem to be enough to go around.

[27 : 00] What comes up in you when you think about just having enough? How far are you from that? How do we all move closer to that? And then notice also in this story that the bread is not to be stored up.

Remember that the Israelites have come out of being slaves and their slavery, their labor, was about amassing grain, storing, and hoarding.

and explicitly this is a counter-narrative to that way of being. Not storing up. Moving against surplus accumulation.

Thinking about how do you keep wealth and possessions circulating versus concentrating. And that's a hard thing for me to talk about. I'm going to be honest.

There's not enough time tonight for me to share my story around money. But I will say, I think I've shared this probably before, that I think about my kids and the structural inequality they'll face because they're black.

[28 : 06] And I'm like, I can't give it all away. I've got to leave something behind. So there's some, I want to name that. This I think is one of the hardest things. It's like, how do you know how much to accumulate?

How do you pass on to your kids? Like, what do you, and how do you also say, no, we've got to keep it moving. We've got to practice mutual aid. We've got to move wealth and possessions through the community.

The third thing that I just want you to notice and reflect on as we move through the series is that this kind of economics is grounded in Sabbath. All right? Practicing Sabbath, this idea that creation is a good gift, that land is to be shared, that it is not, our money and possessions are there for us, not simply to exploit, to be exploited or to exploit one another.

Sabbath essentially means that we can't maximize and maximize. It places a limit on human productivity and leans into the goodness of God.

There's the assumption, as Walter Brueggemann says, that God is willing and able to provide for the good life. And then for Israel, all of these, and we're going to have a whole sermon on this later in the series, but there's a whole set of practices that just come out of Sabbath.

[29 : 25] Practicing rest on a day, but then how do you allow your neighbor to rest and people that don't have as much to rest and all of those in your sphere to rest. Practicing Sabbath means that you can't amass and essentially practice empire and domination.

It places a limit. So, where are you in your practice of Sabbath? Sabbath, how have you thought about it and has it ever had anything to do with economics and money?

Because it's very linked to those things in the biblical tradition. So, three things, three reflection points. I think we have them. Yeah, every family is to gather just enough.

So, this idea of how do we talk about too much or too little? The idea that the bread shouldn't be stored up. How do we talk about accumulating, you know, and how do we talk about circulating well?

And then, Sabbath as the ground of communal economics. The final thing I'll just say here is that this story in the text explicitly says this is a test for Israel.

[30 : 31] Israel is responsible for what it knows about God. And part of that lesson is about restraint and self-limitation as key parts of knowing God.

Self-limitation and restraint. And again, restraint consists in this passage in two practices which are not accumulating too much and keeping Sabbath.

So, the last questions here to reflect on are just what do you make of the idea of that restraint?

Some won't talk really well about in American society and in Western culture.

restraint and being limited are key things to grapple with and they're central to knowing God and imaging God in the world and becoming more human.

And then, how do you measure enough? Maybe that is the key question for tonight and as we go forward into the next few weeks. How do we measure enough?

[31 : 31] So, I'm going to stop there. We are going to have, I'm so excited, next week, Anthony's going to preach about, I mean, it's not, it's kind of sad, but it's going to preach some about, you know, economic predation in the church and kind of speak to the ways in which so much of this can go really wrong.

We're going to talk about Sabbath economics and Shalom. We're going to talk about some of the Jesus stories because Jesus talked so much about money. And the hope at the end of this series is that we are grounded as a community in our next logical step.

Whatever that is and deeply apart from any kind of manipulation and deeply connected to our community outside of these walls.