

Sunday 11th October, St. Andrew's and Wesley, Vancouver:

Abundance in Community

1. Abundance at Thanksgiving

It's a great pleasure to be with you this morning here are St. Andrew's and Wesley United Church.

Nick and I are travelling across Canada, meeting with Iona Community Members and Associate Members, visiting institutions, churches and agencies committed to truth and reconciliation, and listening to first nations elders, clergy and leaders share with us their wisdom for the world. We began in Montreal, came to Vancouver via Guelph, London, Toronto and Winnipeg, and go on east from here finishing in Calgary at the end of the month.

The Iona Community – a dispersed, global, Christian community of around 3,000 Members and Associate Members – is made up of ordinary folks committed to the gospel-work of peace with justice, and dedicated to living this out in intentional community.

We commit to a four-fold Rule of Life and account with, or meet with one another locally on a monthly basis to support one another to live this life. The theme we are exploring in this five year period, and the theme we bring with us to Canada is: what does it mean to be rooted in a faith of hope? And how do we live out this hope in community – in abundant community.

We are committed to abundance in community not for our own sake, but for the sake of God's new community of hope. As our reading this morning reminds us not once but three times – our thanksgiving is focused on the God of love who provides abundantly for all. Our task is a) to give thanks to God and b) to share abundantly the gifts given by God.

And if we're in any doubt about what abundant sharing is, then Paul is happy to remind us! As I read these words, I am reminded of the attributes both of powerful, you could say extravagant thanksgiving; and of abundant sharing here in Canada:

- Firstly, we must “Sow bountifully”. This is with a generosity that doesn't count every ounce, but gives until the barrel is bare. The opposite is also true – if we are overly calculating or mean with our sharing, we can expect only to receive in a paltry way.

Our bountiful giving will be reflected in bountiful harvesting. This is not a promise of personal enrichment – but rather of a harvest that reaps rewards that may be unseen, for the many. If we plant only for our own enrichment, then the harvest will be limited to that. If we plant for the good of all – for the common weal – then the harvest will enrich beyond measure.

This kind of bounty was overflowing in the life and witness of Shahina Siddiqui, CEO of the Islamic Social Services Association based in Winnipeg. Not only in the groaning banquet she offered us for lunch when we visited, but in the quiet, generous giving of advice, shelter, food, supplies, medical support and advocacy, without counting the cost, to vulnerable people. In a world where we witness tight-fisted, calculating, selfishness, witnessing the opposite gives hope.

- Secondly, we are to “Give cheerfully.” This is with a generosity of spirit that focuses on delight and joy rather than on pain and loss. This is an invitation from a God who sees Creation as ‘good’ over and over again; from a God who offers blessing and grace as gifts, with delight.

This kind of delight was evident in the work of Cheryl MacInnes and her team at the Trinity Community Table in Cambridge Ontario freely feed 100 people thrice weekly with a delight in task and relationship that is astonishing. In a world where we witness mean-spiritedness, witnessing the opposite gives hope.

- And in all of this, says Paul, it is God who provides abundantly. There is enough for all. Our task is to share this abundance as we are able, and so to ‘share abundantly in every good work.’

2. Extravagant, abundant community

There’s something about this kind of abundant, bountiful, delightful sharing, that speaks of extravagance. A word so often associated with wastefulness, which in this context speaks of a love that knows no limits.

What does it mean to love, and to give without limits in a Community like the Iona Community? Let me share two examples from our Rule of Life:

- Our rule commits us, in community, to account with one another about how we use our time. Not to judge or to scold, but to listen deeply in order to understand, and support.

- So let me tell you about Jane. Jane is a prison chaplain in London who understands her vocation in ministry as one of listening to young men who have largely been rejected by society. She does this part-time so that she can spend time with family and friends, church and community. And in all of this she is upheld by her local Iona Community Family Group who listen to her stories; support her commitment; and affirm or sometimes gently challenge her when she becomes overly busy, stressed or anxious.
- The extravagant love that she is able to offer the young men in prison is upheld and supported by the extravagant love she finds in community.
- And let me tell you about Teun. Teun is a retired minister in the Netherlands who, through his local Iona Community Family Group and with his local church, he is supporting a refugee network in Italy who grow and pack and ship oranges. By devoting his time and his wisdom to supporting this project called 'Mediterranean Hope', Teun is modelling extravagant, costly time and talent while providing his local community with wonderful oranges harvested by migrants and refugees.
- In these ways Jane, and Teun, and countless others are modelling what it means to join in with God's abundant community, or economy of hope.
- We cannot all do everything. And so, in community, we learn from and lean into one another's offerings of time, money, talent and gift and in so doing unlock hidden potential in ourselves and others.
- And let me tell you about Meg, and Catriona, and Kaz and Pat. They are the craftivists who model extravagant, abundant commitment to sharing God's love in the form of the Fingerprint Labyrinth which is here with us today.
- The right to non-violent protest across the globe is increasingly under threat from repressive laws, excessive force, arbitrary arrests, unwarranted restrictions and invasive surveillance technology. IC members in London England have created a [Fingerprint Labyrinth](#) to protest the right to peaceful protest.
- Whether it's on the streets of Vancouver or Tehran, in the public squares of Glasgow, Kyev or Moscow, the right to protest, to bear witness to injustice, to speak out for peace and hope and truth, is being eroded on an unprecedented scale. In the face of this force, we take our inspiration and our hope from Jesus who in the name of extravagant, no limits love, turned tables in temples; was unafraid to speak truth to power.

- The daily, determined, extravagant commitment of those who turn up weekly on street corners with placards for peace, who walk a pilgrim route, or who put ‘one step in front of the other’ on a fingerprint labyrinth – who daily sow seeds of peace and justice in the world with a cheerful spirit and a generous heart – these extravagant acts of commitment in community will lead to ‘enrichment in every way.’

‘Thanks be to God for God’s indescribable, extravagant gifts.’

Let us pray:

God of all creation:

God of all land, treaty and territory,
of sky, river and ocean,
forgive our greed.

As we rush to name, own,
acquire and sate so
many hungers,
we pray for bread for all
who hunger – and a hunger for justice
for those who are fed.

In the name of the God of all creation.

Amen