

Text: [2 Corinthians 9:6-10 \(CEB\)](#)

Date: February 4, 2024

Title: “Bread for Today & Seeds for Tomorrow” – Releasing God’s Blessings, week 2

Theme: Because of God’s abundant grace, we can let go of some of what we have today to plant seeds for tomorrow.

1

Behind the parsonage, there are a ton of hickory trees
And they ring the whole patio behind the house
They’re tall, and their branches reach out into the yard

Their greatest feature is the annual ritual of the hickory nuts
On those warm but breezy days in the fall
You might be tempted to sit outside and read

Except, after about 5 minutes you are completely unnerved by the sound
of..plunk, plunk, plunk all around you
And when they hit the wrought-iron table? Bwong...
That’s usually the time when the dog looks at you nervously like...”Should
we really be here?”
Unless you want to grab a hard hat, it seems wiser to go inside

And this year was exceptional for hickory nuts
There were so many that Kate wondered: can you eat these?
I was surprised to learn that you can
We cracked some open and they were surprisingly tasty

Every so often, there’s a year where trees seem to produce more seeds,
more nuts, more acorns than others
The name for this phenomenon is a “mast year”
And its usually seen across species of trees in a region
Which is odd...because it’s like the trees are talking to each other
I read about it [happening in NJ](#) during fall 2023 not only with hickory trees,
but oak trees and other species too

The thing about a mast year is that no one can predict when it's going to happen

And no one totally understands why – it might have something to do with weather, maybe with stress

But, you know, it's in the tree's DNA is to survive and pass its genes on to a new generation

It can't do that, though, if the birds and squirrels and deer and occasional humans are out here eating up all its offspring

So one theory is that by producing a bumper crop in a single year, the trees outpace the critters' ability to eat all of them

In that year, then, the trees are planting a lot more seeds than they normally would – giving themselves a much better chance of survival

2

This is counter-intuitive to us as humans

Because in times of stress, we tend to do the opposite

We are tempted to hold back, to turn inward and take care of ourselves

Rather than planting seeds

When we're going through something in our careers

Something in our families

Changes in our financial situation

And we pull back on commitments to serve others

Commitments to generosity

We stop planting seeds

We might pretend not to see our friend's GoFundMe, even though we know they're going through a difficult time

We ignore that appeal from our Alma Mater, though we've given in the past

Or we cut back on our giving to the church

I know I've been there

I've experienced all kinds of transitions in my financial situation throughout my adult life – and you probably have too

You buy a house, you go back to school, you move, you experience changes in your family or in your health

Some of those we have control over – others we don't

It makes me wonder: do the trees ever regret feeding the squirrels so generously?

Even though I have regret around any number of financial decisions I've made in the past

I've can honestly say I've never regretted a dollar that I've given away – to help a friend, as a gift, or to support something that I care about

In fact, those moments of being able to help someone else, are some of the memories I cherish most

3

This week, we're still reading from Paul's second letter to the church at Corinth

And Paul is still trying to raise money to help Jewish Christians in Jerusalem who were hungry because of a famine taking place throughout the Roman Empire

In a sermon a few weeks ago, I talked about this tension between Jewish and non-Jewish Christians, as the faith began to spread
And how it caused significant conflict in the early Church

This project Paul was undertaking was an important test:
Would these new Christians respond to the needs of those who had preached the gospel to them in the first place,
Despite the fact that the Jewish and non-Jewish Christians were so culturally different?

I learned recently that the Greek word we use to talk about community
Actually has as its root meaning "to share things in common"¹
Which is exactly how the early Church is described in Acts 2:44-45 – as
"having all things in common"

By that, we mean not just interests and values, but goods & property
It's still common practice, at least for United Methodist Churches, to
maintain a fund to help people going through difficult times,
particularly those in the church

All this drives home the idea that one key way to build community

One key way to plant seeds of trust in relationships

Is in acts of sharing and generosity

When we share what we have with someone else, we're literally "putting our money where our mouth is" to demonstrate how committed we are to one another

Which is no small thing

I mean, think about a time when someone stepped forward to help you in a moment when you needed help <pause>

When you remember them, don't you feel a sense of connection to them and gratitude for them, even if it was many years ago?

That's what Paul is inviting the church at Corinth into

An opportunity to exercise a trusting relationship with God and with one another

By learning to give cheerfully, joyfully

To plant seeds out of the abundance of grace that flows from the very heart of God

4

Which brings me back to the overabundance of hickory nuts in our yard
And the ongoing squirrel parties we see every day as a result
Every one of these squirrels around here is ridiculously fat

And yet, I have absolutely no doubt that in the next year, we'll still see all kinds of new tree seedlings poking up through the soil

The one who sows a small number of seeds will see a small crop and the one who sows a generous number of seeds will see a generous crop

It's not just a lesson from scripture

It's a lesson from nature and a lesson from God

That there's more than enough – IF we're willing to let go

Because, like Paul says, God has the power to provide you with more than enough

God supplies us with enough seed to plant

And enough bread to eat

We don't have to choose between the seed we sow for tomorrow
And what we use to make bread for ourselves today.

Why?

First, because God's grace is that abundant, and

Second, because we can trust God's Spirit to lead us in our giving

That means God may push us beyond our comfort zones here and there
We may sometimes feel God calling us to give more than we expected
But never so much that we're going to put our own future at risk

It's like Paul says:

No one should give with hesitation or because of pressure

But instead because it gives us joy

Because it feels important

Because it connects us together

That's the lesson from the hickory trees

And that's the lesson of the scriptures

5

There's more than enough

The squirrels are fat!

And the forest will still see new hundreds of new hickory seedlings this
spring

By God's abundant grace, we can have both bread for today

And seeds to plant for tomorrow

I believe that there's more than enough to do the ministry we're called to do
And more than enough to serve the people we're called to serve

The question is whether we have the faith to live it out

To trust the lesson of the forest

The lesson of the scriptures

That God always pours out abundantly more than we can ask or imagine

Amen.

By Joe Monahan, Medford UMC, Medford NJ

¹ Chilcote, Paul Wesley. *Recapturing the Wesleys' Vision: An Introduction to the Faith of John and Charles Wesley* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2004), p.43).