

The Rev. Emily Dunevant

December 14, 2019
Community Prayer Service

James 5:7-10

I have a confession to make. I did very poorly on the verbal section of my SAT. In fact, I always did poorly when it came to words...On the yearly standardized tests in grade school, I was below average. On spelling bees, I was one of the first to be eliminated. And, on my SATs, I can only be thankful that back in my day getting into college wasn't as competitive as it is today.

So, this week during our Advent Luncheon Series we had to think about words. Well, one word in particular: abundance. I had to look it up to make sure I knew the correct definition.

Of course, I know what abundant means. Well, I know what I think it means. I know how I interpret it. It means to have a lot of something. I guess it could go either way – you could have a lot of bad things or a lot of good things. I, however, tend to think of it with a positive connotation.

Now, the official definition of abundance is: “existing or available in large quantities; plentiful.” Existing or available. Those two words bring a little more nuance to this word above the concept of just having a lot of something. They seem to imply that there is also the opposite that needs to be considered. If abundance exists for some, then there are times those for whom it doesn't exist. If it is available for some, it means that some haven't obtained it yet for themselves. Abundance exists but have you figured out how to get it? It's available but is it available to you?

Growing up, I had an abundance of Christmas gifts and an abundance of food and family and love. Not only did these things exist for me but they were always available to me. Year after year, I knew what to expect. I never worried if there would be enough. Abundance was just something that was. I was fortunate.

But as I grew up, I realized that this kind of abundance didn't exist for everyone. It wasn't available to everyone. I remember my parents talking about growing up poor. Of trying to make it out of the wrong side of town, of finally having a hot shower at age 17, of sharing a bed with 3 other siblings because there simply wasn't enough room or money for another bed. They talked of living in scarcity with an edge to their voices, of dogged determination to make it out of where they had been.

That determination shaped our family life in good and bad ways. We were taught the value of hard work, that nothing came easily, and that success wasn't a given. But with those lessons, we also didn't look back or around. Those times of scarcity for my parents were in the rear view mirror. To look back might have given those times of scarcity permission to move back in.

So we all put blinders on.

But that kind of tunnel vision is not what Jesus intended. Jesus wants us to look around and notice. Because the desire for abundance can be overwhelming, especially when you are hungry, cold, unloved, or tired. When you would do anything for food and warmth and companionship and rest. In those times you so desperately want to be seen. And, we need to look.

When Jesus says *"I have come that you may have life and have it abundantly"*, he understands those deep desires that we all carry to live in wholeness. It's not only a statement of can be and what should be. It's a charge...a charge to look around, to take our blinders off and make a difference for someone else.

Thanks be to God. Amen.