

Deuteronomy 8:7-18
A Community of Abundance

Good evening. For those of you who do not know me, my name is Kory Plockmeyer. I am the Executive Director of Movement West Michigan, a nonprofit organization that works in Holland and Zeeland to unite Christian faith leaders to serve with humility and love for the flourishing of all in the community. We are convinced of three things: first, that the Church is bigger than any one institution or organization - what we call the "Big C Church". Second, that the Church is at its best when we are working together and learning from each other. And third, that the City is at its best when the Church is integrated into the fabric of the community with a posture of humble service. I have the joy of waking up each morning to think about *how* to live that out. This 30,000-foot-view of the city and the Church informs how I think about our passage from Deuteronomy 8 and how I think about this community and what our responsibility is as followers of Jesus Christ.

Before taking on this role with Movement West Michigan, I pastored in congregational and campus settings. From 2013-2017, I had the privilege of serving a congregation in Sioux Center, Iowa - a small town situated in the very northwest corner of the state of Iowa. While there was much to love about living in small town Iowa, there was a particular drawback. In Sioux County, Iowa, pigs outnumber people. On the southern edge of town, there was a pork processing plant. Depending on which way the wind was blowing, I might walk out my front door to the delicious smell of bacon. Or, I might walk out the door to the unfortunate smell of - well, the locals would say, "It smells like money."

To me, the uninitiated pastor new to town, this seemed like a drawback. To the locals, though, who knew that nearly every aspect of their economy was interwoven with the agricultural industry, One had to choose the posture they would take towards the unfortunate scent: a posture of frustration, of negativity, of dislike and disgust. Or, a

posture of gratitude. A posture of hope. A posture that recognized that the present reality may be less than ideal but portended a better future.

Here in West Michigan, we have the privilege of living, working, and playing in a community of abundance that is rich with natural beauty. We get to live here - a place with stunning sunsets, the beauty of four seasons, an award-winning downtown shopping district, even the best flower festival in the world. We can give thanks for our community's growing diversity. We give praise to God for thriving, walkable neighborhoods. For high quality educational opportunities for the next generation. And despite being an alum of Calvin University, I can even give thanks for Hope College and the vitality that a rising generation of leaders brings to our community.

We do not, of course, turn a blind eye to the enduring challenges we face within our community. I can affirm the many good, wonderful, and beautiful things we enjoy while living here in Holland while still acknowledging that we are a far cry from Paradise. We know that there are undercurrents of division and polarization. We know that there can be a deep divide between the haves and the have nots, a line that far too often follows the divisions between races and ethnicities within our community. We can acknowledge that there is a growing mental health crisis, particularly among the younger generation. We can and should name that there are a growing number of people sleeping in their cars in the parking lot of the very place that is employing them, fully employed and yet unable to find an affordable place to live within our fair town. All of these things can be true while we still acknowledge that, when taken on the whole, we live in a pretty amazing place.

In Scripture, God's people were promised a "good land," as we read together in the Old Testament reading from Deuteronomy. The diverse range of abundance is striking: natural resources like streams, brooks, and springs. Healthy crops like barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, and honey. Raw materials like copper and iron. In other words, that which is needed for stability and growth. Where provision is supplied not only to

survive, but to thrive. I am struck in particular by the promise of those raw materials: these serve three primary purposes in the ancient world: protection, creativity, and worship. In other words, the promise of Deuteronomy chapter 8 is for a community of abundance.

But God's people have a choice to make as to how they will respond to that abundance. They must choose the posture they will have. When faced with a time and place of overflowing goodness, will they turn inward or will they turn outward?

Verses 11-14 warn of the grave danger that they will face in the time and place of abundance: "Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God," the people are warned, "Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied... then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery."

When we follow this thread throughout the book of Deuteronomy, we find that the knowledge that God's people were once enslaved was supposed to be a prompt to live open-handedly. This was supposed to dramatically transform the ways in which they interacted with one another.

So in Deuteronomy 15, the people are commanded that, contrary to the normal practices of the world around them, they were not to own one another as possessions. After someone had worked for them for an allotted period of time, they were to be sent away. But those in need were not to be sent away empty-handed. Deuteronomy 15:13-15 reads, "when you release them, do not send them away empty-handed. 14 Supply them liberally from your flock, your threshing floor and your winepress. Give to them as the LORD your God has blessed you. 15 Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you. That is why I give you this command today."

In Deuteronomy 5, the reminder of God's saving work in their lives was to set them free from the need to work relentlessly and tirelessly: "Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the LORD your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day."

And in Deuteronomy 24, God's people are told, "17Do not deprive the foreigner or the fatherless of justice, or take the cloak of the widow as a pledge. 18Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you from there. That is why I command you to do this."

In other words, our reading today from Deuteronomy 8 reminds us that living in the community and place of abundance was not *just* about having an *attitude* of gratitude, but living in such a way that others too would know and enjoy that abundance.

This past week, I had the opportunity to sit down for lunch with a local business owner. He shared with me how he had watched his heart over the course of the past several years. He had a hard moment when he realized that his investment portfolio tended to bring forth one of two responses within his heart: when the markets were down, fear that there would not be enough. When the markets were up, greed that he could make more. Either way, he said, my heart was in the wrong place.

As people living in a community and place of abundance, we do well to heed the reminders of Deuteronomy 8.

We have a natural inclination to choose a posture of scarcity. To lead with fear, to lean into an attitude that focuses on *mine*. *My* rights. *My* stuff. *My* accomplishments. We can focus on a desire to protect, to encircle, to enforce, to rule. After all, we have worked hard. We do this in our relationships - this is why Paul needs to remind us in 1 Corinthians 13 that love does not keep a record of wrongs.

Let me be the first to say that I find myself readily falling into this attitude of scarcity. Whenever I am a guest preacher, I nearly always end my benediction with the reminder, "Do not be afraid." I say those words to myself as much as the congregation. A reminder that through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ I am assured of God's presence in my life and I need not fear. I can live with open hands and an open heart. But when we live in a community and place of abundance, it is easy to lose sight of the grace that is at the foundation of my identity.

For, friends, we are reminded that our ultimate abundance is not in the sunsets, award winning flower festivals, or economic prosperity of our fair city. What makes our community truly a place of abundance is not the 139 congregations serving our community. For there are not 139 churches, but one Church. One Church rooted in the grace and love of Jesus, living out that faith and responding in 139 diverse bodies and expressions.

Our ultimate abundance is in the grace and love of the one who unites us. For my worth is not in what I own or what I have. It is not found in what I do, how hard I work, or how much I contribute. What makes our community a place of abundance is, ultimately, in the people of God responding to the grace of Jesus by living with a posture of abundance.

The posture with which we live in a place and community of abundance has the power to be a living testimony to the grace we have experienced through Jesus Christ.

When others look at us, will they see those who live with a posture of scarcity, worried primarily about protecting our rights, defending our stuff, and keeping others out?

Or will they see a posture of abundance? A community that lives in such a way as to do everything in our power to ensure that others have the opportunity to experience the

same grace, love, and welcome. A place in which the Church leads with humility, love, forgiveness, and welcome.

In the fall of 2022, 17 churches welcomed refugee families from Afghanistan. These 17 churches were motivated by the desire to welcome the foreigner with the love of Jesus Christ. Our organization, Movement West Michigan, worked behind the scenes to provide collaborative support for those resettlement teams, ensuring that communication could flow freely to support and encourage those teams as they supported their new neighbors. I watched as churches and nonprofits alike came together to ensure that these families received a warm welcome. Thanks to the diligent work of so many people in our community, many of the families that resettled here are now welcoming other family members who were originally settled into other parts of the country. Our community is seeing generational change because of the posture of abundance.

I think of the numerous local churches serving neighborhood schools through organizations like Kids Hope USA and Hand2Hand. Quietly and without fanfare, the relationships that these churches have developed with the school turn into a deeper partnership and relationship with their community. I think of the Hope Christmas stores at Fellowship Reformed and Harderwyk Ministries. I think of the support that the Power H shop at Holland Public Schools receives from Central Wesleyan. Or of the investment of Fourteenth Street into HLA. Our community is seeing generational change because of a posture of abundance and welcome.

I think of the ways that churches are adopting shifts at Community Action House, ensuring dignified access to healthy food options for those who need it. Or of the ways that those in need of assistance know that they will be treated with love and respect by the good people of St. Vincent de Paul. Our community is seeing generational change because of a posture of abundance and welcome.

There is one Church with many expressions and tonight we celebrate that unity. Tonight we celebrate and give thanks that we live in a place of abundance. And tonight I invite you to ponder your own life, your own community of faith, to wonder what that posture of abundance may look like in your household, at your Thanksgiving celebrations, in your life together as a church.

For we have been welcomed into the people of God by the grace of Jesus Christ. And those who have received such a welcome, we are challenged to live with an attitude of abundance, set free from scarcity and fear. May we be known, not as those with the aroma of money, but the aroma of grace, love, acceptance, and abundance. Amen.