

Because we are entering week 3 of a series on Renewing our Covenant, I would like to take a moment to connect back to the last two weeks... Copies of these messages are available on our website in the Worship Archive section if you wish to go back.

We began with our Baptism. Baptism calls us to lead a life of commitment to God’s will, a life of Christian discipleship. Baptism has significance throughout our lives, therefore it is in order to acknowledge and to celebrate the grace of God bestowed on us in baptism and to lay claim to that grace every day. Baptism is to be the referent point for our daily lives, with all that it means renewed through daily repentance and faithfulness in discipleship. Just a reminder that we will be ending this series with a reaffirmation of our baptism- a renewal of our covenant- during worship next Sunday. This will be a chance for us all to remember our baptism, be thankful, and recommit to God’s power and rule in our lives.

As a platform to look at the meaning of our Baptism in action, digging deeper into our understanding of our covenant relationship with God more passionately, the acronym I.M.P.A.C.T. was introduced. Impact can be broken down into: **I**mpant. **M**ultiply. **P**rovision. **A**bundance. **C**onsecration. **T**hanksgiving. It would be too much to try to tackle all of these at once, therefore, they are being introduced 2 x 2 x 2.

We spent last week looking closer at **I**mpant and **M**ultiply. Doing so highlighted our call to sow, or more intentionally implant, our gifts to God and God’s purposes. We are to do so generously, for implanting our gifts to God generously will reap generously. The more we invest, the more we yield. A secondary “I” word was included and that was “Initiative.” Christ took personal initiative in giving graciously and generously to the disciples and to us: Grace, truth, love. In the same way, we are to take initiative in our giving to God and not wait to do so out of extortion or compulsion. And when we give to God and God’s purposes, we are encouraged by God’s promises and God’s power that our gifts will be multiplied to serve the needs of God’s kingdom. I spoke of the miraculous multiplication of gospel math. Not only this, but God will enable you as the giver to give beyond your ability to give. We make a commitment to give in faith, trusting God to help provide the fulfillment of that gift according to God’s will.

Today, we are going to look closer at **P**rovision and **A**bundance. Both of which are found in Paul’s Philosophy of Christian Giving as we read in **2 Corinthians 9**. Giving is one of the ways Paul outlines faithful fulfillment of one’s baptismal covenant relationship with God.

We live in a world in which much of life is dictated by scarcity and limits. There are only so many hours in a day, so much money in the bank, so many skills to apply to the task at hand, so many toys to play with, so many cars and drivers able to carpool and get everyone where they need to be; and as a result, there are often times when things we would like to see cannot be accomplished. It is hard for us to comprehend the meaning of God’s unlimited power, because nothing we know in this world is without limits.

Nowhere is that more clearly seen than in the matter of salvation. God provides freely what we could never obtain on our own. The sacrifice that Jesus made on the cross provides salvation through grace for

all those who believe. No matter how many people accept Jesus as Savior, the saving grace of Jesus is never exhausted. No matter what sins a person may have committed, grace is able to cover them all. Grace abounds more than sin ever could.

God's grace is not just extended to us at salvation, but for every part of life. 1 Peter 4:10 reads, "As every man/ woman hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." Grace is available to us for every challenge and trial and temptation we face. There is no possibility of the supply being exhausted. There is no danger of going to God for help only to find that God is no longer in business, unable to provide for us, because the supply of grace has been depleted. We have overflowing abundant grace from God.

Two key words rise to the surface: **P**rovision and **A**bundance. Let's unpack **P**rovision first.

A young adult, Meghan Ryan, writes, "A couple years ago, when I moved for the 10th time in 10 years, I had a meltdown in my U-Haul truck. I don't like change, so I was a combination of sad, angry and disappointed. I didn't want to start over. While I was throwing an epic "pity party," I realized it wasn't just about the move. It was about what the move represented: my desire for control and my lack of trust that God was going to provide what I needed in this new season, even though He had previously provided every time.

It seems easier to trust God when we can cling to the comfort of the familiar instead of navigating something new. Which is why I relate to the Israelites' struggle to trust God as they wandered in the wilderness. When God took Israel out of Egypt, God committed to take them to the promised land. But in the change and the unfamiliar, they started to complain. They wanted to go back to Egypt because at least they had food there (Exodus 16:3). In the pain of the unknown, they forgot God's promises and doubted God's provision.

What we can glean from this story is that God met them in their complaining (Exodus 16:12). God told them about providing bread from heaven just for them every day. The manna spoiled by the following morning, which meant the Israelites had to gather fresh manna every day and trust God to provide it (Exodus 16:4). Still, even when God gave them what they asked for, they didn't trust God. They gathered more manna than they needed because they feared God wouldn't send more. Instead of letting God's past provision point them to what was promised for the future, they tried to protect and provide for themselves.

I began to reflect, "How often do I look at what God provides for me and write it off because it didn't come in the way I wanted it to?" During my move, I was disappointed by my situation. I so desperately wanted God to provide a husband and a nice house we'd own ... I missed what God actually did provide: a new place that was an answer to a lot of prayers I had prayed.

God provides in unexpected ways. It's not just about the manna; it's about what the manna represents. God sent manna from heaven to represent the Bread of Life He would send from heaven: Jesus.

The manna didn't look like the provision the Israelites wanted. Jesus didn't look like the Messiah King they expected. And if we are honest, God's definition of provision doesn't always look the way we want it to or hope it will. But God's perfect provision for us is promised and fulfilled in Jesus (John 14:6). The Israelites would be hungry again, but Jesus says in Him we will never hunger

again (John 6:35). God did not leave Israel physically hungry, and God will not leave us spiritually hungry either.

Consider the natural world. God's provision extends to relationship with God's creation, which includes the rain, sun, wind, and tides. It includes the birds and us. God says through Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, "if I promise to provide and care for even the sparrows, won't I provide for you that much more." (Matthew 6)

Psalms 34:10 says, **"those who seek the Lord shall not lack any good thing."**

"God's path will never lack God's provision." Toby Mac

"God's work done in God's way will never lack God's provision." Hudson Taylor

"We have all things and abound: not because we have a good store of money in the bank, not because we have skill and wit with which to win our bread, but because the Lord is our shepherd."
Charles Spurgeon

In John 15, Jesus says, "I am the vine and you are the branches, abide in me, and I will produce fruit in you abundantly." He also says, "depart from me, and you will produce nothing." God is our source of life and we must remain connected. God will provide for us, and... here is where we bridge into our "A" word, **A**bundance... God will provide for us not just a little, but a lot.

Let's go back to what Paul writes in 2 Cor. 9:10-11, **"Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion."**

That is really it. God's promise is, "I will provide for you and I will provide for you in abundance." And there is a really good reason God provides so abundantly for us. There is a really good reason God's grace abounds for us. So that, in order that, we can give abundantly in return, to God and to others.

One author, who happens to be a pastor, reflects, "There are times in my life when I feel like I've got nothing to give. There is no gas in my tank. No food in my fridge. I've got nothing left to say. When I feel this way, however, my life doesn't stop. The trickle of emails keeps dripping into my inbox. The phone keeps whining for attention. The next sermon is in 10 minutes. My to-do list looks like 5,000 hungry people.

*At such moments of emotional scarcity, I like remembering the story of Jesus feeding 5,000. It reminds me of a fundamental truth—that the ministry I serve in Christ pivots not on how much I have or what I can give, but rather on how much God gives by multiplying what I have. (If it sounds like there is overlap with **M**ultiply, you are right. All the letters I.M.P.A.C.T. are intricately woven with one another.)*

After the news of the murder of his friend John, Jesus retreats to a lonely place. I imagine to mourn. The locals get wind that Jesus has come. The crowd is overwhelming and needy. Jesus heals with compassion. The crowd stays late, and the disciples want to send the people away so they can get something to eat. But Jesus has another idea—what we call in the business “a teachable moment.” Jesus wants to teach his disciples something fundamental about the nature of God. It is a lesson, if we take it seriously, that frees us to re-imagine the world.

Jesus says, “You feed them.” The disciples look puzzled. They have nothing. No food. No reserves. They stare out at a hungry mass of people that looks more and more like a hungry mob. The disciples respond, “We have nothing—only five loaves and two fish.” Jesus says, “Bring your nothing to me.” He blesses the fish and bread and proceeds to distribute food to the masses. As Matthew tells the story, “All were filled.”

This story reminds me that sometimes Jesus is asking me to simply give my nothing—my little loaves and fishes—and then to stand back and watch Jesus teach a different kind of economy, an economy grown by God’s abundance.

This is a challenging thought. The God of Jesus knows no limitation. Out of nothing, God creates (in Hebrew) bara—something. The economy of the kingdom of God is abundant and knows no scarcity. My fridge doesn’t always have to be full for Jesus to take what I have and feed others.

Now, we aren’t to take this as an invitation to be frivolous or live beyond our limits. Even after an experience of abundance the disciples still gather up and conserve wisely the leftovers.

Here is a question for us to consider: Do we ever buy into the myth that there is not enough to go around? Do we operate with economic assumptions of scarce resources: energy, food, etc.? I’m guilty of this. I live out a vision of scarcity with my own checkbook, time and resources. This story of Jesus challenges me to re-imagine my life and live into an economy of God’s abundance. In the kingdom of God, we don’t have to hoard—there is always enough supply to meet demand.”

In faith we acknowledge that practical Christian living is not a natural thing. At its core, practical Christian living is supernatural, meaning it transcends the natural world. This faith empowers us to bid farewell to the scarcity mindset. Jesus said, **“I have come that they may have life and have it more abundantly”** and empowers us to extend the limits of our spiritual comfort zone. It isn’t God’s desire that we live easy, comfortable lives. We must base our promises upon God’s promises.

I would like to close with an impact quote from Becky Giles who shares, “My first boss in my very first job out of college said many things to me that I tucked away and still refer back to close to 40 years later. **“Each day, swallow the ugliest frog first”** is one of them (words that I try to live by every day!), but that’s not quite the point here. ☺ **“Activity breeds activity”** is another. I think that is what IMPACT is all about – getting out there, doing for others (which makes us want to do even MORE), which organically spreads the desire to serve and do to others.” God’s providence breeds time, talent, and treasures to us in abundance, and our sharing of the time, talent, and treasures given to us by God breeds more giving, more sharing, more, more, more.