

CONTENTMENT & SIMPLICITY

Enough 3!

Luke 12:13-21, Proverbs 22:1-2, Psalm 34:1-8, 19-22

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Greetings!

Thank you for joining this worship program and connecting online with Hudson United Methodist Church. I'm John Duntley, a lay leader at Hudson United Methodist and am pleased be sharing today's message on living a contented life. Today's message is part of a four-part series on the spiritual aspects of personal finances. The basis for the series is taken from the book and materials titled, *Enough: Discovering Joy Through Simplicity and Generosity* by Rev. Adam Hamilton^[1]. Rev. Hamilton is a highly respected preacher and teacher that leads a large Methodist parish in Kansas City. So far in our journey over the past few weeks, Rev. Dawn Jeffers Ramstad started off reminding us that our finances can be both a blessing and a temptation, and Deacon Susan Amman offered practical spiritual lessons in budgeting. Today I will offer some perspectives on cultivating contentment and simplifying our lives in the process. As we begin this message, will you please pause with me for prayer. "May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in Thy sight O Lord our Strength and our Redeemer. Amen." (Psalm 19: 14)

We just heard in today's reading from Luke, the Parable of the Rich Fool, "*Be on guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.*" (Luke 12:15) To which the rich man went and stored away his bountiful crops in larger barns without sharing any and at the night of his impending death God called him a fool, asking him "*And all the things you have prepared, whose will they be? So it will be with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.*" (Luke 12:20-21). How are any of us also like the rich fool who seems more concerned about possessions than our faith or gifts toward God? Are we? It may be a hard question to ask ourselves.

In *Enough*, Rev Adam Hamilton mentions the great example of several recent summers where wildfires have caused people anguishing decisions about possessions. We have seen it every season on the news, wildfires in California and northern Minnesota this summer, hurricanes on the Gulf Coast, floods in the Northeast, tornadoes in the Midwest, that force people of all backgrounds, poor and wealthy, to make instant choices on what possessions to take with them as they evacuate their homes, not knowing if anything else will ever be seen again. What would you grab to take in that flash moment? A favorite toy, family photos, important records, a valuable family antique, your laptop?? What do the news segments usually remind us of when they interview the survivors in tears? Most often they are grateful to have survived with their lives and the lives of their loved ones. The possessions bring tears, but the loved ones bring much more to be valued and thankful for. The parable we just heard tells us not to be concerned with possessions, to be rich in our faith toward God, yet our culture so often pushes us otherwise.

Rev. Adam Hamilton identifies our condition as Restless Heart Syndrome, one where are heart or soul is often discontent. We so often find that we may never be satisfied with anything, as soon as

we acquire a possession or achieve a goal we scarcely have time to enjoy it before wanting something else. While this constant state of discontent may be adverse, Hamilton asserts that God wanted us to hold a certain amount of discontent. That discontent with some issues in our lives causes us to yearn for a relationship with God, to build a devoted regular prayer life, to pursue social justice, to love others and grow in character. Hamilton further suggests caution with our frequent discontent with our stuff, our money, our jobs, our friends, our family-----be content with all the good that God has provided. In Hebrews 13:5-6, we hear *“Keep your lives from the love of money and be content with what you have; for he has said, “I will never leave you or forsake you.” So we can say with confidence, “The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid.”*

Finding contentment for our hearts and minds becomes a key pursuit for us all to consider, a balance of contentment and discontent. The Apostle Paul wrote about contentment to the Philippians from his jail cell; *“¹¹Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. ¹²I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need.”* (Philippians 4:11-12). Considering Paul’s reflection on contentment from his confinement, our ability to find contentment in our modern lives should not be too difficult. Rev. Hamilton gives us some further insights on contentment with four keys to cultivating contentment.

1. **“It could be worse”** – These four words are suggested to be the equivalent of keeping our minds on the bright side of life or finding the silver lining to situations, issues, relationships. Maybe the high mileage car is showing its age but it is still reliable transportation. Maybe a friend is wearing on your nerves but is always ready to help you out with things. REMEMBER “It Could Be Worse”
2. **“How long will this make me happy?”** – The key question to ask before purchasing something that you “must have”; Will it be a product that brings happiness or function for a long time or will it be out of style or use quickly? This also applies to taking a new job, taking a trip, many situations. If a special type of car attracts your interest, try renting one for a week and see if it really makes as much of a difference as you dreamed it might. ASK “How long will this make me happy?”
3. **Develop a grateful heart.** Gratitude is essential for finding contentment. A grateful heart recognizes all of life as a gift. Contentment comes when we spend more time giving thanks than thinking about what is missing or wrong in our lives. We can all practice being appreciative of something a family member does or a work colleague shares, or a neighbor helps out with. Develop a grateful heart.
4. **Where does your soul find true satisfaction?** --Our material world may define satisfaction in terms of things, comfort, money, fun. The Bible teaches that we will find satisfaction in God alone. Jesus said the two most important things we must do are to *“love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind”* and to *“love your neighbor as yourself”* (Matthew 22:37,39) Seek true satisfaction in your soul.

Hamilton offers these four keys to cultivating contentment and steps further to suggest that they we may find these keys more likely to succeed if we seek a simpler life. Contentment and simplicity are seen to go hand in hand, when we are content, we simplify, when we simplify, we are more content.

The following are FIVE suggestions for building on simplicity.

1. **Live below your means.** Try setting a goal to reduce consumption. Buy the low or mid-grade product instead of the high-end product. When considering a new vehicle, think about one that has better fuel economy than the one you drive now. Use recyclable materials in place of new. Take your own bags to the store. Hold back on the use of your credit card or cards. Pay cash. Live simply, below your means.
2. **Before purchasing ask; Do I really need this?** ---Is it a real need or just a want? Can you do the same thing with what you already have? Wait 24 hours and see if you still really “need” the item. As mentioned earlier, test the item by renting before purchasing. Or is it something I can borrow from a friend or neighbor. Ask; Do I really need this?
3. **Use something up before buying something new?** Completely use existing items until they are used up, empty, broken or worn out. Purchase items that will last long rather than products that may not last as well. Reduce, reuse and resell or donate. If it applies, can you find it at the resale store? Use everything before buying new.
4. **Plan low-cost entertainment that enriches.** Maybe sitting at home with the family to watch a movie is as fun as all going out to the theater. Or taking a walk in the woods, or park can be as fun as going to an amusement park. That big distant travel vacation could be replaced as memorably with a simpler week close to home. Taking the kids fishing and camping may be much more memorable than heading to Wisconsin Dells for a hotel waterpark weekend.
5. **Ask; Are there major changes that would allow me to simplify my life?** Are there items about your possessions, home, job or activities that could reduce costs, reduce stress or simplify your life? Maybe the paid off car can work well for three or even five more years. Maybe there are activities, credit cards or regular purchases that you could reduce or stop. This is sometimes a family decision so it takes a bit more communication, discussion and engagement. Just don’t put it off forever.

What does all this contentment and simplicity offer? Ultimately if we seek to point ourselves more toward these elements, we may also find more connection to our faith as well. If we can realize and see that we have enough, in so many ways, we may be able to make a difference to others and to our community. Maybe we can find more satisfaction and value in the contributions we make to the church. Maybe we can find a way to support a mission that is meaningful to us, that brings us further contentment.

Our church has a strong mission focus that may include something that you would find contentment in supporting with time, materials or funding. We have numerous food program missions from the school Backpack program to Wednesday bread give-away to Wednesday church family dinners to holiday meals at Thanksgiving turkeys, Easter hams or Christmas dinners. We have Sunday school programs that are always welcoming teachers and leaders, and a caring ministry program for any in need of a visit. We have a “Sew Much Need” group that devote time, stitching and materials to serve caring and emergency needs. We have an online church ministry that has formed during the pandemic that has a bright future and can use technical talent as well as worship leadership support. We have an ongoing divorce care group ministry that brings meaning and insight to both men and women. We support a Day Away respite program for older adults in the youth house. We have a music ministry that welcomes added voices to the choir. We have Zoom

prayer groups, book clubs, and amazing annual youth mission trip, and many other ministry options for all. Our Accountable Leadership Board seeks a few new leaders each year to fill rotating positions in providing the church with regular leadership in advancing our mission to reach and inspire all individuals on their faith journey of becoming disciples of Jesus Christ. That is an outstanding quick list of SOME of the things we experience here at Hudson United Methodist Church and I apologize for those that I may have left out, overlooked or did not know about.

The point is, this is an excellent mission focused church community. Many of these mission ministries create some of their own support but, in reality, many need the support of the full church body in order to thrive. That is where each of us, each of our families, has the opportunity and the responsibility to share what we can to make them all succeed. That is where we can make an annual pledge to support the church's missions. And if we can measure our contentment and simplicity levels, maybe we can find a little bit more to pledge this year. Or maybe we can make a one-time contribution to our operating reserve fund. Or if we really have a keen interest in one of the projects from our "God-sized vision" to expand the accessibility and functions of our building, we could make a special gift to our building fund. While this is God's House, it is our church, it is your church. Let's all consider how we can increase the contentment and simplicity in our own lives and find spiritual fulfillment in our church community.

Let us close with a short prayer; God you have wired our hearts so that we long for you, yet so often we try to satisfy this longing with other things. Teach us Lord to find our true satisfaction in YOU alone. Give us wisdom and understanding so that we may learn how to cultivate contentment in our lives. Fill our minds and hearts with truth and the power of self-control so that we may stand firm against the temptation to seek instant and material gratification, choosing instead a higher and greater good. In Jesus' name we pray. AMEN.