Sermon starter: “Our fair share”

2 Corinthians 8:13-15

How is it that there are enough resources on our planet to feed the entire world, and yet so many hunger? As people of faith, what is our role in a world where the gap between the rich and the poor only seems to widen? How do we ensure that everyone—all of God’s children—get their fair share?

When the Apostle Paul visited the early churches in Macedonia, they became excited about the ministry opportunities he laid before them. These early followers of Jesus couldn’t help but get caught up in Paul’s contagious zeal for the ways God was working in their midst. So much so, in fact, that they actually pleaded to be a part of the “service to the saints” Paul spoke of while visiting their community—even though they were themselves living in poverty. This “ministry to the saints,” referred to in his Second Letter to the Corinthians is another name for the offering Paul and the early churches were organizing for those in distant Jerusalem who had been suffering as a result of a devastating famine. The offering was considered a ministry; in other words, an expression of religious conviction, a spiritual calling, a living out of one’s faith.

To organize a church-wide offering, a relief fund, if you will, (One Great Hour of Sharing is not original!) was not only practical in leveraging funds, it was also a visible expression of their Christian unity. This offering was a way for Paul to model the unity of all believers and to provide a way for them to care for one another—even if they did not know each other personally. For the churches in Macedonia and Corinth, many of them would never see or meet the Christians they were helping in Jerusalem. So their ecumenical offering was a concrete representation of the Gospel, that in Christ there truly was no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female, might I add rich or poor—no longer separation or division, but unity in Christ.

Everyone, regardless of economic or social location, has a gift to give. Our God supplies the gifts and resources so that we can give back. After all, none of what the early followers of Jesus gave was really theirs, right? Because all that we have—all that we have—is whose? God’s! We’re simply giving back to God what is already God’s. In giving to God, we give to others. The act of giving is an act of faith, believing that our gift will be part of transforming a life, a community, and indeed, the whole world.

“For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus the Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich” (2 Cor 8:9). This is what God has given; through our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ the Good News has been shared with us so that we never doubt that we have all we need, and in turn ensure that others get what they need. “For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has—not according to what one does not have. I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance” (2 Cor 8:12-13).
The Message translates it this way, “Nothing left over to the one with the most; nothing lacking to the one with the least.” So our abundance becomes their need and their need becomes our abundance. Have you ever thought of it this way? What would happen if all of us made choices based on this concept? We could achieve a fair balance across the globe by not only sharing what we have, out of our abundance, but also by recognizing the abundance in the needs, challenges, spirits, and stories of our sisters and brothers all over the world. “It is not with your own wealth that you give alms to the poor,” asserted St. Ambrose, “but with a fraction of their own which you give back; for you are usurping for yourself something meant for the common good of all. The earth is for everyone, not only for the rich.”

Our generous and gracious God has given us life and a world where there is already enough for all—this has been proven time and again. It is our task, thus, to ensure a fair balance. As the Church in the world, through One Great Hour of Sharing, we have the opportunity to act in one accord as the body of Christ by giving what we have; to collaborate and strategize on how we might share this world of enough in ways that are more equitable; ensure that everyone gets a part of the plenty, and guarantee that all of God’s children have what they need. This is the offering, the “ministry to the saints” that Paul was promoting.

This is still our ministry, all these centuries later, through One Great Hour of Sharing—received not only by this church family, but across the country by Christians of many denominations contributing to an ecumenical offering which has shared abundance for the meeting of needs for almost seven decades.

Together, we can make sure that everyone—yes, every single one of God’s children, our sisters and brothers—get their fair share, bringing about a world the way God intended it to be.

Ready to change the world?

Worship resource written by Amy Gopp for the 2015 One Great Hour of Sharing.