



I just have to tell you about this church I know. Amazing things are going on—they actually saved a life. What a story! I'm connected to quite a few churches around the county, I have friends and colleagues in all kinds of faith communities, and I've seen just about everything. But I've got to tell you about this one place in particular. It's remarkable.

While many, many churches today are living in "scarcity mode"—afraid for their lives, living week-to-week, hunkering down, focusing inward and thinking only about survival, this church I know is living in "abundance mode," living in trust and faith, living open-heartedly, creatively meeting the needs of others, trusting in the movement of the Spirit of God among them; and instead of focusing on scraping together just enough to pay the bills, this community of faith lives has a vibrant vision of where God is leading them that is deeply centered in the joy of seeing lives touched, lives, changed, lives saved! What a story it is!

I'll come back to that. But I want to read a passage from the end of the book of James. And I just have to warn you—this is unpleasant—really unpleasant. These are harsh words for a community of faith—a group of people who have fallen deeply into scarcity mode. And James gives them the wake-up-call-to-end-all-wake-up-calls. If this was a news story—and it was in the 1st century, the news team would begin with something like this: [have Swen pre-record this and hit play right here: "We want to caution our listeners, the following story contains graphic information and may not be suitable for some listeners." So here's the reading from James 5:1-6:

And a final word to you arrogant rich: Take some lessons in lament and sorrow. You'll need buckets for the tears when the crash comes upon you. Your money is corrupt and your fine clothes stink. Your greedy luxuries are a cancer in your

gut, destroying your life from within. You thought you were piling up wealth. What you've piled up is judgment. All the workers you've exploited and cheated cry out for judgment. The groans of the workers you used and abused are a roar in the ears of the [Lord of Hosts]. You've looted the earth and lived it up. But all you'll have to show for it is a fatter than usual corpse. In fact, what you've done is condemn and murder perfectly good persons, who stand there and take it.

See what I mean? See what I'm talking about? There are a lot of hot-button words are in: "Arrogant, rich, lament, sorrow, crash, corruption, stink, judgment, exploitation, corpse, death. James hangs it all out there, and then some. I think it would completely justified if, on first glance, we came to the conclusion that there's absolutely no good news in there at all.

But friends, I'm here to tell you today, that there is. I found the good news—it's in there. And you'll know it when you see it. Good news isn't always visible, at first. Sometimes you have to dig a little bit, open yourself up, maybe even do a bit of self-evaluation, do some fearless moral inventory. Sometimes you have to have someone point it out to you, introduce you to it. Sometimes you just have to see the good news at work to believe it!

The good news flowing out of this hard passage is that we know what life looks like when generosity is not at work—and it wasn't at work in the community James wrote to! James paints a clear picture of what it looks like when generosity slips away and arrogance and sorrow and corruption and exploitation begin ruling the place: it looks like death. James gives us the picture of a community that's afraid for their lives, they're hunkering down, they're focusing inward and thinking only about survival. But the message here—the meaning behind James's harsh words is about what life looks like when abundance and generosity abounds!

And THAT is the good news! There's a new way to live! And it looks a lot like a community learning together about trust and faith. It looks a lot like a community living open-heartedly, open-handed, living together in mission, creatively focused on the needs of others, trusting in the movement of the Spirit of God among them to provide for the needs of those who are in need. It's a community that instead of focusing on scraping together just enough to pay the bills and keep the doors open, is a community of faith that lives for the joy of seeing lives touched, lives, changed, lives, saved because hearts are open!

So let's go back to that church, that community of faith that I was talking about? Let me tell you about it. What a story it is! At some point they made the bold and daring decision to abandon the scarcity model. If they were going to live by faith, then they were going to go all in. Having done that, they made the decision to embrace abundance by trusting God to take them where they could not see, to serve people that they may not know, with resources that they would have to trust God would provide...—just enough at just the right time for just the right purposes. Not long after they made that critical decision, their faith was tested. A lot of people who didn't share that same vision left and went other places. And with them went their support. There are many ways to measure support, but it got so challenging that at the end of one particular month the ability to break even came within \$100 of not doing so.

But the community of faith continued to live into the promise that God provides just what is needed, just when it's needed, for whom it's needed. And God continued to provide. Over the span of a few years, the entire community came back to life! As part of the ongoing narrative of God's faithfulness, the people began to celebrate the good news that God makes a way where there is no way, and that the seemingly impossible good news does indeed take place: In the worst economic times in recent memory, this faith community lives for the joy of seeing lives touched, lives, changed, lives, saved because hearts are open!

And that's when Patrice arrived.

(Introduce Patrice to the congregation, and give her the opportunity to tell her story and just to say "Thank you for saving my life and bringing so much hope to me and my family.")

You probably know by now that this church I know, the community of faith I'm talking about that gave up sacristy and embraced abundance—this church that saved a life—Patrice's life... is Prince of Peace. That community of faith is this community of faith and this community of faith is you. This is a place where we have the privilege of investing—one dollar at a time. This is a place where, when we give money to the mission and the ministry that God has set before us, beautiful, tangible, remarkable things happen: lives are restored, hope is renewed, love is expanded, and the world is a better place. And we get to celebrate Patrice's story because instead of living in scarcity mode—holding tightly to what little bit we think we're holding on to, hunkering down for today, being afraid of tomorrow, thinking only about survival, Prince of Peace—as a community of faith

is living in abundance mode, living in trust and faith, living open-heartedly, creatively, focused on the needs of others, trusting in the movement of the Spirit of God among us; and instead of focusing on scraping together just enough to pay the bills, this community of faith lives for the joy of seeing lives touched, lives, changed, lives saved! What a story it is!